KATHARINE
NORTH

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KATHARINE NORTH

A Novel

BY

MARIA LOUISE POOL

AUTHOR OF "MRS. KEATS BRADFORD" "DALLY"
"ROWENY IN BOSTON" ETC.

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TO

C. M. B.

I BORROW A PHRASE WITH WHICH TO DEDICATE
THIS STORY "TO HER WHO BEST
CAN UNDERSTAND ME"

1334430

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KATHARINE NORTH

I.

AT FEEDING HILLS

"Hear with meekness,
Hear with meekness,
"Hear thy word with godly fear."

"Don't sing so loud, Kitty," whispered one girl to another.

"Why not?"

"Because," suppressing a giggle, "Deacon Grove is looking right at you."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? Why, you don't want to be his fourth, do you?" with another smothered giggle.

The congregation were singing right on through the next verse.

"I guess my singing loud won't make me his fourth," was the response, and the speaker struck in on:

"Till thy glory,
Till thy glory,
"Without cloud in heaven we see."

and sung triumphantly on to the end.

She did not once glance at the man standing against the wall in the right aisle. But we all know that a "woman does not have to look to see," so it is not surprising that she saw that man with perfect distinctness, and knew that he was gazing intently at her; also that he was tall and

very good-looking; that is, he was good-looking for an old man. He must be nearly forty, she thought. She herself was not quite nineteen, and she knew a great deal about everything, much more than she would know ten years later.

As she sang, "Without cloud in heaven we see," she was thinking that it was time for people to die when they got to be forty. Life could not be worth much after that age. As for her, she meant to be intensely happy ages before she was as old as that. She did not know at all in what way this happiness was coming, but it would certainly come. She felt within her a most abounding capability for enjoyment. There was to be nothing humdrum in her future.

Deacon Marcellus Grove was, in point of fact, forty-two. He did not think of his age as that singing girl thought of it. And he always took a great deal of pains with his beard. It was trimmed, and combed, and brushed, and flowed out in a way at the sides that he hoped would attract attention from the fact that he was bald. He was also careful about his dress, being different from the other men in the neighborhood.

People said he was thus particular concerning his dress because he was a widower so often, and looking for a wife so often, that naturally he had formed the habit of "dressing up."

In truth, he had not been lucky in the matter of wives. That is, if it is not lucky to have them die, which is as may be.

But this misfortune had the compensation of giving his life a kind of liveliness, besprinkled with funerals though it was, that it might have lacked if he had lived along year after year with one wife. He began marrying very early. He sometimes thought resentfully that it was not his fault that he was a widower so much.

Now as he stood with his gray spring overcoat thrown back, one hand holding his hat and the other fingering

his watch-chain, he found it quite interesting to watch Katharine North as she stood there singing.

He occasionally looked at the girl with her, but his eyes immediately returned to Katharine. He had really never noticed her before. He wondered that he had not done so. But then it had not been so very long since Katharine had ceased to be a child. While he was engaged in burying wives, this girl had been growing towards womanhood.

After a few moments, while some one was telling something of his religious experience, Katharine's friend "nudged her," and, leaning close, said in her ear:

"Do see the deacon—I'll bet he'll offer to go home with you to-night."

Katharine smiled in satirical unbelief.

"If he does, what sh'll you say?" persisted the girl.

"I shall say, 'No, I thank you,'" was the prompt reply.

"They tell about his being so interesting, you know, and—"

"You must not talk so much. Besides being impolite, it's wicked."

Having thus spoken very emphatically, Katharine again opened the Epworth Hymnal and rapidly turned over the leaves to find the hymn they were now singing. Her young and victorious tones swelled the flood of song.

"Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above—"

Then she suddenly stopped.

"What's the matter?" whispered her friend.

"I hate to have him look at me so!" came the furious whisper in return, with a dangerously accented emphasis on the word "hate."

But girls like to use strong phrases. Nothing less than the strongest seems to them worthy to express their feelings.

Katharine's friend put her hymn-book up to her face and smiled into it. She meant to keep close to Kitty, so that she might hear that old widower ask to walk home with

Miss North. It would do that man good to have some woman say "No, I thank you" to him. She wondered that none of those women in the years gone by had said it.

When the congregation had at last stopped singing, the minister asked if "Brother Grove would lead them in a season of prayer."

Mr. Grove immediately knelt down, and grasped the arm of the settee nearest him. A good many people bowed their heads forward, but Katharine flung hers back.

Deacon Grove was only a few yards away. Presently the girl found herself gazing at his profile, and the bald spot on the top of his head. Then she was listening to his voice, and to the words he said.

It was frequently remarked that Marcellus Grove was "very gifted in prayer," and this remark was true.

Katharine rather resented the interest she felt as the penetrating, earnest voice went on with its petition. She had never given Deacon Grove a thought before. But then she had never before seen him look at her in that curious way.

When the benediction was given, the two girls hurried towards the door. Several of the brothers and sisters stood there, and they shook hands with the two in that cordial fashion which is so pleasant.

A little further out in the vestibule some young men were waiting for their girls. The two friends passed by these also. Katharine's companion began to think she had been mistaken, after all—that man was not coming.

She had opened her lips to say this, when a voice at the other side of Katharine said:

"I'm going your way, ladies. Please don't say I mustn't share the road with you."

This was not the manner in which the young men asked. They came to your side, and put this question:

"May I see you home?"

Now a person can answer such a question as that by "yes" or "no." But Katharine could not tell an old man,

and a deacon, that he should not walk along the same road with her.

Joanna Damon again nudged her, and this time so violently as to cause her friend to sway somewhat markedly towards Mr. Grove.

That gentleman promptly took advantage of the circumstance. He had learned to take any advantage that came in his way.

"It is really very rough here," he said.

He took Katharine's hand, and drew it within his arm.

When this occurred Katharine reached forth her other hand, and convulsively clasped a fold of her friend's skirt, thus making it impossible for Joanna to move a step away.

But Joanna's home was in sight now, and there would be a quarter of a mile to walk alone with this man before Katharine's home was reached.

It was but a few moments, and then the two girls were saying good-night to each other in a solemn, constrained way.

Joanna stood on the door-step an instant, watching the two figures walk down the path. Katharine had taken the chance to drop her companion's arm, and she was moving rapidly, with her head thrown up in a way her friend knew very well.

Joanna turned towards her own door.

"Ain't it funny?" she said to herself.

When she entered the room where her father and mother sat, she was still smiling slightly.

Her mother was putting a patch on Mr. Damon's overalls, and Mr. Damon was nodding heavily over a copy of *The New-England Farmer*.

"Did you have a good meetin'?" asked Mrs. Damon, glancing up over her spectacles as she drew out a long linen "needleful."

"'Bout the same as common," was the answer.

Then the girl laughed.

"What do you find to laugh at?" inquired Mr. Damon,

glad of an excuse to put down *The Farmer* and take off his glasses.

"Guess who's going home with Kate North?" she said.

"I d' know, I'm sure," responded Mrs. Damon reflectively, putting a pin in the corner of the denim patch, "less it's Dick Sanders."

"It isn't, then. It's Deacon Grove."

Mr. Damon suddenly sat upright.

"The old Harry!" he cried. "I'm a good mind to go out 'n' thrash him!"

"Why, Enoch!" said his wife. "Ain't Deacon Grove a good man?"

"Good man! Thunder! Good enough, fur's I know. But how many wives is he going to have? We ain't Mormons here."

"But they're all dead, Enoch," gently remarked Mrs. Damon.

"Dead! I know they be. But ain't Marcellus Grove got any—ain't he got any memory, I should like to know? And Kitty North! I hope her folks 'll stop it."

"Why, Enoch, the deacon is real good-looking. And he's likely, and well off. I don't know that Kate North is anything so special—"

Enoch hitched impatiently in his chair.

Joanna glanced from one to the other.

"I guess," she said, "that her folks wouldn't have to stop it. She'll stop it herself."

"Don't you be so sure of that," responded Mrs. Damon. "Women always did like Marcellus. He ain't got so old that they're going to stop liking him right away. And he's got a lot of money, and he's a deacon in the orthodox church."

"He's been coming to the Methodist prayer-meetings a good deal lately," remarked Joanna with a significant smile.

Her father hitched again more violently than before. And he said "Thunder!" again.

Mrs. Damon told him, in her mild, treble voice, that he

wasn't setting a good example. He grinned at his daughter, and responded that as long as Joanna wasn't a boy he didn't s'pose there was any danger of her saying "Thunder!"

The subject dropped here.

Mrs. Damon asked if there were any signs of a revival, and Joanna replied that she hadn't seen any signs, though the prayer-meeting was considerable fuller than common. And they were going to have another to-morrow night.

"P'raps they'll be havin' some protracted meet'ns," said Mrs. Damon.

"P'raps they will," answered the girl; "and if they do, I know somebody that'll go."

"What do you mean?" inquired her mother.

"I mean Deacon Grove. All the prettiest girls go to the Methodist. Why," laughing, "I go myself."

When Joanna had gone upstairs to her own room, Mrs. Damon asked her husband if he thought it was wise to talk as he had done about a Christian brother—and before his child, too.

"Oh, bother the Christian brother!" was the irreverent response.

"Have you anything to say against Mr. Grove?" insisted the woman.

Mr. Damon rose, making a great shoving of his chair as he did so. He stretched his arms above his head, and yawned loudly.

"He combs his whiskers too much," he said at last. And after a moment he added, "If I was on the witness-stand, and you was cross-examinin' me, I couldn't swear to a single thing against Marcellus Grove."

"I thought so," said Mrs. Damon, putting the last stitch in the patch.

"All the same," went on Mr. Damon, winding his watch —"all the same, I ain't sorry the deacon didn't happen to take a notion to shy up to our Joanna."

To this remark Mrs. Damon judiciously made no response.

Meanwhile Mr. Grove and Katharine were walking along the country road, which was lighted by a young moon that was already in the western horizon.

It was May, and the air had that damp, hopefully suggestive sweetness which is like nothing else. It makes one think of violets, of lush meadows, of the jubilant call of the red-shouldered blackbird as he flies over the still, soggy lowlands.

The moonlight was on the faces of the two. Katharine's head was still flung up rather defiantly, and she was walking fast. She had been careful that her companion did not again put his hand on her arm. She was thinking that if he did do that, she would tell him that she would rather walk alone.

Her face grew hot as she thought of what everybody would say about Deacon Grove's going home with her. She knew very well that it was not a mere accident, even though this was the road to the man's home.

Once she gave a swift side glance at him; she met his gaze upon her as it had been upon her in the prayer-meeting. Her eyes burned with anger. She only made an inarticulate murmur in response to his remarks. She hurried still more.

He said something about the pleasantness of the evening. He added that the roads were so settled now that it would be agreeable driving. He asked if she had seen his colt lately.

"No," she answered.

He went on precisely as if she seemed interested. He had a new buggy, and the colt was now so well broken that he was thinking of inviting Miss North to drive, he said.

"Don't invite me," said Katharine. She flashed a fierce look at him, and then seemed to dart forward even faster along the road. But his long, easy stride kept him beside her.

"You .know that place in the woods by Livingstone's Corner where the arbutus grows, Miss North?" he said.

"Yes, I know it."

"If it's a pleasant day to-morrow, won't you let me take you there with the colt? The flowers are very thick, and you'll like the colt, I'm sure."

"Thank you, no," answered Katharine.

There was her house now, showing darkly in the faint light.

This widower was actually courting her. She could not hasten her pace more without breaking into an actual run.

Mr. Grove took out his handkerchief. She turned sick as she inhaled the cologne upon it.

"I thought you liked horses?" he remarked.

"I do."

"And trailing arbutus?"

"I do."

Deacon Grove was greatly interested and stimulated. He was confident he knew women as well as any man alive. It was really wonderful how much variety there was among them, when in reality they were all alike in one great womanly attribute: admiration for the masculine portion of humanity, and for him as a unit in that multitude.

He drew his long side-whiskers through his fingers in a way he had. What did it matter if this girl fancied to snub him a little? It was like an exciting dash of bitter in a sweet beverage. He had never been snubbed much heretofore.

"I'm positive you would enjoy that colt, Miss North. He is as spirited as—as a young girl."

No reply to this.

Mr. Grove left the subject of the colt.

They were getting near Katharine's house now. He had not much more time in this interview.

"I suppose you think I am an old man, Miss North?" he said.

He unconsciously straightened his shoulders as he spoke.

"I haven't thought on the subject," the girl answered.

The tone in which these words were spoken had some-

thing the effect of a stinging blow on the face. It had this effect even upon the rather tough specimen who heard the remark.

Katharine North did not enjoy being impolite, and she was almost frightened now at herself. At the same time she said, mentally, that "she was glad of it."

Deacon Grove ceremoniously raised his hat, and said, "Good-night."

Then he walked with extreme erectness down the road. But as he went he began to smile slightly under his moustache. He turned, and looked back at the North homestead. He began to hum faintly one of the hymns he had noticed Katharine sing,

"Till thy glory
Till thy glory
Without cloud in heaven we see."

The clock in the steeple of the "orthodox church" struck nine.

The door was suddenly opened from within by a woman who glanced at Katharine, and then looked along the highway where the deacon could be seen walking.

"I thought I heard voices," said Mrs. North. "Who came home with you, Kate?"

The two entered the sitting-room before the girl answered, and then the question had to be repeated.

"Deacon Grove," was the reply. A gratified smile came to the woman's face.

"Did he?" she exclaimed. "Well, his last wife's been dead going on a year. How odd you look, Kate."

There was no response.

Katharine turned her dilated, shining eyes upon her mother. As the two women gazed at each other, the elder said again, "How odd you look!"

Katharine took off her hat and little gray jacket, and held them in her hand.

Her mother's glance and tone hurt her in some inexplicable way.

"Has anything happened?" Mrs. North asked.

"Oh, no."

"Did Mr. Grove say anything special?"

"He asked me to go with him to Livingstone's Corner for arbutus."

"Well, his last wife's been dead most a year."

"Mother!"

"What say?"

Katharine's hands beneath her jacket pressed tightly together. She gazed into her mother's face with a vague, piteous entreaty. Her heart was beating painfully. But when she had looked for an instant into the large, good-natured countenance turned towards her, she did not speak the words which came to her lips. She moved away to the closet where she hung her "things."

"Are you going?" inquired Mrs. North. "But I s'pose there's no need to ask that. Of course you'll go."

The woman sat down comfortably in the rocker. She had a dim sense that she wished her daughter would not look at her like that. But Katharine always had rather queer ways with her. She had never been quite able to get used to them. It was often a trial to her to think that her daughter was "singular." She hoped that other people didn't notice it. She did not really think they did.

The girl dropped her singing-book on the top of the melodeon. She seemed to be trying not to speak. She was obliged to compress her lips to keep them from trembling.

"I wish you wouldn't put your book on the melodeon," said Mrs. North. "I always have to take it off when I clear up the room."

"I forgot."

Katharine took her hymnal, and disappeared into the back room.

Her mother rocked placidly.

As the girl did not return immediately, she was called.

Katharine came, and sat down by the lamp-stand. She

studiously refrained from looking at her companion, whose chair creaked regularly as it swung back and forth.

"Is that all Deacon Grove said?" presently inquired Mrs. North.

"It's the principal thing, as near as I can remember."

"Of course you'll go," repeated the elder woman.

Katharine nervously clasped her hands again. She had known since she knew anything, that her mother never spoke impatiently, never was cross, and never yielded. She was like a large, immovable mass of something in the way.

"No," said the girl, "I sha'n't go. I told him I wouldn't."

Mrs. North did not even look at her daughter as she said, in her guttural, stolid voice,

"Sho! now, Kate, don't you go and be silly."

There was no reply to this.

"I s'pose," remarked Mrs. North, "that there ain't anything in this earthly world so foolish as a young girl. And girls think they know everything."

Again no response.

Katharine had taken up a copy of *The Congregationalist*, and was looking steadily at it. Though her lips were still compressed, there was a tremulous movement in the delicate, slightly receding chin.

"I s'pose Mr. Grove is lookin' for another wife," remarked Mrs. North.

"Yes," exclaimed Katharine hotly; "I'm sure he is. Oh, he's a disagreeable old man!"

She thought of his eyes and the expression in them.

"He ain't old," was the response. "And most folks don't think he's disagreeable either."

"I hope his wives didn't think so," said Katharine. "Poor things! I wonder if they all liked him."

She spoke the word "all" as if it referred to scores of women.

Mrs. North rocked. After a few moments she said that probably the deacon was too sensible to think Kate meant it when she had said she wouldn't go after arbutus with him.

"I'm sure he knew I meant it."

"Well, p'r'aps we can find some way to let him know you've changed your mind."

Mrs. North slowly moved her head until her spectacles shone directly upon her daughter's face.

"But I haven't changed my mind."

"Sho, now!" in a gently exclamatory way. "Kate," in a somewhat dejected manner—"if you go on like this, it's likely as not you'll be an old maid."

"As likely as not," repeated the girl.

Her eyes sparkled as they were turned towards her mother.

"I've observed," said Mrs. North, "that the young men don't seem to take much notice of you, somehow. Have you noticed it?"

"I hadn't; but now you mention it, I think they don't."

Katharine could not help smiling a little as she said this. Her smile was like a flash of lovely light. And it was gone like a flash.

"I've always thought," went on Mrs. North, "that it was best for girls to take up with the first respectable chance they have."

"Mother," cried the girl, in an intense voice, and throwing out her hand with an uncontrollable gesture as she spoke—"mother, you are a very strange woman. You—you almost frighten me."

"Oh, no; I guess I don't frighten you much," in an unmoved tone. "You mustn't be so nervous, Katharine. You take after your Aunt Kate about being nervous. She wasn't a bit like me. I never could see how she was my sister. But folks in the same family sometimes turn out real different. I don't see how 'tis so, but 'tis. Now, Katharine," returning to the subject, "likely 's not you never 'll have another chance. And if you don't you'll be sorry enough you didn't take Mr. Grove. He's an excellent man. And he's forehanded, too. Men don't think much of old maids. Nobody thinks much of um. I don't know what

your father 'd say if he knew you'd been saucy to Deacon Grove."

Katharine had dropped her hands in her lap, and they lay there tightly clasped. She did not try to make any response to her mother's last remarks. She had an impulse to say she had not been saucy. Then it occurred to her that perhaps she had.

"Well," said Mrs. North, "I guess we won't worry. I'll try to think of some good way to get word to Mr. Grove that you've changed your mind. I'll do it soon 's I can. It won't do to lose much time, for, if he's really looking out for another wife, he may see somebody else."

The girl sprang to her feet. She felt as if she were shut up between solid, slowly narrowing walls. She wanted to scream, but she combated that inclination. She had never come absolutely against this wall before. Her mother had always been kind, and taken excellent care of her daughter's body, and heretofore Kate had been willing to obey. She had felt many things dimly, however.

"Mother," began the girl, in that concentrated mood which means so much, and which tears the sensibilities of those whom it controls, "you mustn't send word to that man. Because I sha'n't go with him."

Mrs. North took a half-knit stocking from the stand, and carefully rolled it up, winding the yarn about it.

"You'd better go to bed now, Katharine—I hear your father coming."

Katharine had lighted her lamp when Mr. North came into the room from the back door.

He was a tall, thin man, with a small tuft of whiskers on the point of his chin. He had a high nose, and a domineering way of walking and moving about the room. Most people said that "Colburn North had everything his own way," which shows how little most people know.

He was elected one of the selectmen just as regularly as the day of town-meeting came round. Other members of the board were sometimes dropped and new names put up,

but Mr. North was never dropped. He was also town clerk, and often one of the school committee. In short, as some one tersely expressed it, Mr. North "run the town." But of one thing this gentleman was inwardly conscious, and that was that he did not run his wife. But he had never hinted to any human being that he knew this. He had every appearance of being the head of the house.

He came in now in a kind of hectoring, assertive manner. He said he was tired to death of town business, and that it was astonishing how many fools there were in one small place like Feeding Hills. For his part, he was tired of fools.

"Good-night, father," said Katharine, looking at him as she reached the door.

There was something in her look that made Mr. North conscious of a sudden softening of his mood.

"Good-night, Kitty," he replied. When she had left the room, the man turned to his wife.

He had stretched out his feet to the full length of his long legs, and had put his hands to the bottom of his pockets, as he sat in his arm-chair after his labors in behalf of the town.

"Has anything happened?" he asked. "What's come across Kitty?"

"She told me Deacon Grove come home with her from prayer-meeting."

"The devil!" said Mr. North, suddenly drawing in his feet from their extended position.

Mrs. North did not, apparently, notice this exclamation.

"And he asked her to go to ride with him," she went on.

In Feeding Hills, to ride is to sit in a carriage and be drawn by a horse or horses. It is not to sit on a horse's back and be carried in that way.

"Of course she told him 'no,'" said the man

"Yes, she did. But I've been telling her that I'd try to get word to him that she'd changed her mind."

"But she has not, has she?" Mr. North rose, and began walking about the room. He looked displeased.

"I've noticed," said Mrs. North, "that the young men don't seem to care much for Katharine."

"No matter if they don't. Young men are generally puppies, anyway."

"And," went on the woman, "Mr. Grove is an excellent man. It don't do to throw away chances. I think he'll make her a good husband."

"He's made some kind of a husband a number of times," snorted Mr. North. "But I haven't anything against Grove."

The man walked twice across the room. Then he stopped in front of his wife.

"Roxy," he said, "I don't want you to say anything to Grove. Let it alone."

Mrs. North rose, and began placing the chairs in their proper places.

"It's high time we went to bed, Colburn," she remarked. "And you do look real tired. Have you felt any of that rheumatism to-day? Did the plaster work well?"

Mrs. North took the very best care of her husband, and she always cooked the food he liked. She was really an exemplary helpmeet.

The next day was Thursday. Every Thursday, at about half-past ten, Mr. Grove drove over to the Feeding Hills railway station to bring back goods from the freight for his store.

At twenty minutes after ten Mrs. North put on her shawl and hood, and walked down the road in the direction from which the deacon would come. At twenty-five minutes after ten there came round the corner a large, white-faced horse with an express-wagon behind it. The animal trotted on at a good pace towards the woman. Mr. Grove saw the figure, and recognized it. He smiled a little. He involuntarily put up one hand and pulled out his whiskers.

Katharine had seen her mother go. She went upstairs, and looked out of the east chamber window. She saw Mr. Grove's horse turn the corner. Then it was stopped, and its driver stepped out of the wagon and joined the woman who had gone to meet him.

II.

THE DEACON'S BETROTHED

THE girl, looking through the small-paned window of the east chamber, was saying to herself,

"I never 'll forgive mother! Never!"

All the blood in her body seemed to have mounted to her head, and to be beating there in heavy pulses. She was ashamed. Besides the indignation that ruled her was the impulse to hide herself, so that no one should ever see her again. And would Deacon Grove think, perhaps, that she had encouraged her mother to see him?

How could she ever look any one in the face again? She knelt down, and watched the man and woman there in the road. They were talking about her. Though she could not hear anything they said, every word dropped on her quivering heart like a bit of hot lead.

Mrs. North, when Deacon Grove had alighted in response to her signal, remarked that it was good weather for planting. The deacon made answer that it was first-rate, and that he had some peas up six inches.

Then the two stood in silence. The man knew perfectly well that this woman had not come out here to tell him it was good planting weather. He improved the silence by looking searchingly at the house a short distance away. He imagined there was a figure at the window upstairs. After all, then, that girl knew what her mother was going to do. He quite enjoyed the situation. He did not think any circumstances previous to any one of his former marriages had been more piquant. In fact, those other women had not been in the least like Katharine North.

Though she had made an irrelevant remark at first, Mrs. North was not in any degree embarrassed.

"I understand," she now began, "that you walked home with Kate last night from prayer-meet'n?"

"I had that pleasure."

Mr. Grove was rather proud of his power to use such polite phrases. He was the only man in Feeding Hills who ever employed them. And no other man in the hamlet used so much cologne on his handkerchief, or so much citronella on his beard and hair.

"From what she was telling me," said Mrs. North, "I'm afraid she was kind of saucy."

"She was very entertaining," said the deacon gallantly.

"I guess," said Mrs. North, "she's sorry she wasn't respectful. I shouldn't wonder, Deacon Grove, if you hadn't better overlook it this time. You know she's nothing but a girl."

"Do you mean that she's changed her mind, and will go to ride with me?"

Mr. Grove thought it was time to come to the point.

"Yes," calmly answered Mrs. North.

"I'm rejoiced to hear it. I shall call round with the colt this afternoon about two."

He sprang into his wagon with ostentatious agility. It wasn't worth while to raise his hat to that fat, heavy woman in the red shawl, whom he left plodding along back to her home.

As he approached the house, he could not see any figure by the window.

That figure had started up and almost literally flown down the stairs when Mrs. North turned into the yard.

Katharine was standing erect in the middle of the kitchen as the other woman came in. Mrs. North glanced obliquely at her. Even her dull soul was moved in some obscure way. She took off her shawl in silence; she arranged the steel chain-pins in a fold.

The girl opened her lips to speak. But at first she only

gave a kind of gasp. The fury of shame and outrage in her soul almost suffocated her. What was that old man thinking of her now? The fine-cut, supersensitive face was convulsed for an instant.

It is dreadful to see youth suffer. For youth has no past to tell it that suffering is sometimes short-lived.

"Mother, I *hate* you! Hate you!"

The voice burst out in tumult.

Having put her shawl away, Mrs. North sat down. She had never seen her daughter just like this, and she never had understood her. But she had sufficient shrewdness to tell her that after this volcano mood had raged there would be a reaction. Then would come her time. Katharine was conscientious almost to morbidness. For a dull woman, Mrs. North was very bright.

"I guess you better not talk while you feel like that," she remarked, "and I guess you better set down."

The girl did not appear to hear.

"Mother, did you tell him I'd changed my mind 'bout going with him?"

The young voice rang through the room in such a way that it was a wonder that the elder woman could bear it without any change in that steady, thin-lipped mouth, or in the light-blue eyes.

Mrs. North was telling herself that she was acting for the child's good, and she was so narrow that she could not have the slightest glimpse of any other side of a question save her side. There was no other side. That girl might rave if she chose, but in the end she would have to do the right thing. How extremely silly it was for Kate to beat about in that way! The elder woman was dimly aware of a great contempt for a nature that could go on like that. She never did so. When she was growing up she never did so. And what she had never done— Mrs. North found no words at this stage of her thoughts.

But she had her kind of affection for her daughter, and she did not like to see her in this way, and wasn't she doing the very best thing in the world for Kate?

"P'r'aps you better not talk until you feel more kind of calm," she remarked again. "Have you pared the p'taters?"

Katharine shook her head. Her voice would not come for an answer to that question.

"You'd oughter have pared um," said Mrs. North, taking the "wash-dish" and going to the cellar door. "You know they're better this time of year if they stand in cold water a little while 'fore they're boiled."

She disappeared down the cellar stairs in quest of the potatoes.

Kate heard the heavy foot-fall on each step.

"Yes, I *hate* her!"

She whispered this to herself.

Then the intolerable sense of injury and shame seemed to surge up higher yet.

She took a step towards the open cellar door. She clenched her hands and lifted them. Her eyes seemed to turn red.

"And I don't care if she goes to hell! Oh, how I suffer!"

She stood still until she heard her mother coming back.

Then she turned, and ran out of the house and across the road to the barn.

She clambered up the narrow stairs which led to the hayloft, and sank down on the hay.

Presently a hen came from a corner where she had stolen her nest. She went half flying and half running by the girl, cackling furiously.

Mechanically, as she had done almost every day since she was large enough, Katharine rose, and went to the nest. She gathered up three eggs.

Instead of exercising her usual care, however, she paused at the edge of the scaffold, and dropped the eggs over on to the floor.

They fell with a little thud and splash.

Katharine gazed down at them. She said aloud,

"I wish there'd been a dozen!"

But the trivial action had had an effect upon her. That she should have wasted eggs viciously was a sin she comprehended instantly.

She put her hands over her face. "Oh, what will mother say?" she exclaimed.

She was still more a child than a woman, in spite of her eighteen years. A New-England girl is very likely to be crude enough until she is perhaps twenty-five. Her body does not mature rapidly, and her mind has not been led into wide fields. Only let her be "capable" is the thought in the mother's mind. And there is generally nothing in this world so "facultied" as this same New-England girl. But sometimes there is also shed in her soul "that light that never was on land or sea." Where does that light come from? From what mysterious source does the girl get that look in her eyes which has nothing to do with making good yeast-bread, or keeping the house without dust?

When Mrs. Colburn North saw that wonderful shining on her daughter's face she always said to herself that Katharine took after her Aunt Kate. The elder Kate used to look like that sometimes, and Roxy never knew what to make of her sister. And the elder Kate never was sure about bread, and her dried-apple pies were not fit for the pigs.

The girl stood a few moments with her hands pressed tightly upon her eyes. She was beginning to think how wicked she had been. And her mother had always taken such care of her. Katharine had very frequently been told how often she had the croup when she was a little thing, and the number of hours when her mother had been "broke of her rest" on her account.

As she stood there now, there was mingled with the keen consciousness of the broken eggs on the barn-floor the thought of the times when she had had the croup. She could not remember the times, but it seemed as if she could.

She slowly turned, and went down the stairs. Her mother

saw her coming across the yard. All the fire was gone from her aspect. The door opened.

"Mother," said Katharine, with tremulous courage, "I've broken three eggs."

Three eggs were large in the woman's eyes. But she said gently, "Well, I guess we won't worry 'bout um."

"But," persisted the girl, "I meant to break them. And I wish you'd forgive me about—about everything."

She was standing close to her mother, who looked with kindly calmness into the fresh eyes that were wet with coming tears. Some women, looking in that young face, would have had it come to them with decisive force that they would say nothing more about Deacon Grove. But this woman never changed her mind. And now was the time to speak.

"I sha'n't lay up anything, Katharine," she remarked, with as near an appearance of affection as she ever attained. "And I do hope you won't be silly about going with Mr. Grove. He said he should call for you about two o'clock. I guess you'll be ready. If you care for your poor old mother, you won't plague her any more. She knows what's best."

Mrs. North reached forth her fat hand, and patted the girl's arm. Katharine's brows contracted. She turned away her head. She was wishing that Mr. Grove did not inspire in her such a desire to run away from him. Perhaps that was because he was old and she was young. Yes, that must be the reason.

And she must yield to her mother. Katharine was spent by the storm, and penitent also. Her mother was in the same attitude—as a rock that remains immovable though the waves beat upon it. The girl had beat passionately upon that unswerving will. Now she said,

"I'll try to be ready."

When she had said those words, a sensation of keenest shame covered her face and neck with a blush. She looked imploringly at her companion, who only patted her again and said,

"That's my good little girl. Deacon Grove is an excellent man. And you know the young men don't seem to pay you any attention."

"Oh, don't!" cried Katharine sharply.

She walked towards the door.

"You'd better wear your new brown dress. It's real becoming."

"Yes, ma'am," was the answer.

As the girl left the room, her mother turned to the mixing-dish and the flour-sifter she had put on the table.

"I'm sorry about them eggs," she was thinking.

Then she proceeded carefully to make a soft custard, because Katharine liked soft custard.

So the girl went with Deacon Grove after arbutus that afternoon, and in twenty-four hours all Feeding Hills knew that the deacon was going with Colburn North's daughter, and that she would undoubtedly be his next wife.

Nearly all the women thought it was a good chance for North's girl. And many of the men, as Mr. North and Damon had done, said "The devil!" when they heard the news.

But everybody acknowledged that there was nothing against Grove.

As for Katharine herself, to her great surprise, the hour with the gentleman was not so disagreeable to her as she had expected.

In truth, when she came to the door in answer to his knock that afternoon, there had been something in her face and manner that appealed to Mr. Grove's pity, and he treated her with a sort of kindness very different from what she had expected. How could she guess he was thinking,

"That mother of hers is a tough one."

"Ain't you going to the prayer-meeting to-night, Kitty?"

Joanna Damon was standing in the kitchen of her own home. She had her hands in the dish-water, and was rattling the silver spoons in the hot suds.

As she put her question, she glanced with a teasing smile at Katharine, who was sitting in a chair near her.

"No."

"'Fraid the deacon 'll go home with you? I declare, if I didn't want him to go, I'd just tell him so, and have done with it."

"No, you wouldn't."

Katharine leaned forward, that she might touch her friend's arm.

Though the gesture was apparently so slight, Joanna was vaguely moved by it. She turned, and looked down at the face which was lifted towards her.

She dropped her spoons with a splash into the soapy dish-water.

"Oh, Kitty!" she cried softly, "what is it?"

As Katharine drew herself back, a tremor passed over her face.

"Joanna," said Katharine, "I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what will become of me."

She suddenly stood upright. She gazed about her like an animal contemplating flight.

"Oh, Kitty!" repeated Joanna. "Don't. You look kind of crazy. You frighten me."

"I don't know but I am kind of crazy," said Katharine.

She put one hand over her face, as if she were smoothing the look away.

"Joanna," she said, in a low, awed voice, "I wonder what sort of a woman my mother is. Did you ever hear anybody say?"

Joanna almost shrank back, so strange did this question seem to her. And how thin and harassed her friend's face was!

"Everybody always says she's one of the best of women. I never see anybody so willing as she always is for you to have things, Kitty; and so pleasant. She never scolds you, does she?"

"No, indeed!" was the hasty reply.

Katharine was thinking how she must have been cared for when she had the croup. She almost wished the croup had been allowed to take its course.

Joanna deliberately dried her hands on the towel. She left her dishes, that she might the more conveniently contemplate her companion.

It was three weeks since Mr. Grove had taken Katharine to get the trailing arbutus. She had been to drive with him twice since then. It was considered a "settled thing," and widower's courtships were proverbially short. That North girl was going to be the fourth Mrs. Grove. When Joanna thought of this, there was a strange mixture of feeling as she gazed at her old school-mate. But she did not envy her. Joanna was engaged to a young man who had just got a position as travelling salesman. She thought any girl was to be pitied who was not engaged to a travelling salesman, and to one who wore light-colored suits and had an admirable glibness of speech. Still, all girls could not be as fortunate as that.

"I've been thinking about my mother a good deal lately."

When Katharine had said this, Joanna inquired hurriedly,

"Ain't you well, Kitty?"

But the girl did not answer her. She went on:

"And I feel just as if I were dashing my head against a stone wall. It doesn't do a bit of good to dash your head against a stone wall. Not one bit. Oh, I'm so tired of it! I'm so deadly tired of it!"

Joanna stood in bewildered silence. She wished her mother or somebody would come in.

What did Katharine mean about a stone wall? But Joanna began to be very sorry. She wished she could do something to help. And she had never noticed before that her friend had such eyes. She wondered that she had not noticed them.

"Joanna, did you ever want to be happy? Did you ever think and think how lovely it would be, and how very happy you could be?"

The other girl shook her head.

"Oh, I have," said Katharine, a pink flush spreading over her face. "I have, so many times. Why, I believe that every drop of blood and every nerve in me could be full of happiness. I don't know how it is, but often, when I've been out of doors in a lovely summer day, something has come over me so that it was just as if I were in heaven. You know I don't mean that kind of heaven where they stand up and play on harps all the time, but— Oh, I can't tell what I do mean. And I want to be happy. I must be. I have such a longing—it hurts me sometimes. Do you ever feel so, Joanna?"

"I don't remember 's I ever did."

"You'd be sure to remember if you had?"

"Of course," said Joanna, "I like to think about George, and about having a nice home and keeping house so cosy and— No, I don't know what you mean, I'm afraid."

While Joanna was speaking thus, the other girl had been gazing intently at her. As she gazed, the glow faded somewhat from her face. She looked disappointed, almost grieved.

"I'm sorry I have bored you so," she said.

"Oh, no," was the hurried response. "You ain't bored me a grain. But I do think, Kitty, that you ought to appreciate such a mother 's you've got. I guess she knows what's best. Everybody says she has such good judgment, and has always done everything for you."

"Yes," responded Katharine, "she has always done everything for me." Then, with an access of impetuous feeling, "I do wish I liked Mr. Grove better!"

"I know he's old," said Joanna, with an agreeable consciousness that her travelling salesman was not old. "But I guess, if you're going to marry him, you might as well begin to like him—don't you think so? He seems dreadfully taken with you. Everybody says so."

But Katharine did not seem to hear the assertion that Deacon Grove was taken with her.

Her face had gradually assumed something of its usual expression, which was often suggestive of a kind of passionate calm.

She took up her hat. And now she made the announcement that Mr. Grove wanted to be married before June was out.

"What!" exclaimed Joanna in her liveliest voice. "Why, June's out in two weeks!"

"I know it. He's got to go to New York, to see about buying some goods, and he says he'd like to make the trip a wedding journey."

"Oh, my! Then you're engaged to him?"

"No, I'm not, either."

"Well, you're just as good as engaged. I sh'd think you'd like to go to New York first-rate. Everybody says Mr. Grove makes a good husband."

Katharine made no reply. She went to the little glass, and settled her hat on her head. There were little tendrils of light-brown hair loose on each side of her face.

She turned, and looked at her companion for a moment.

Unsatisfactory as Joanna was, Katharine felt that she was thoroughly friendly; and she was the only person to whom she could speak at all confidentially.

Joanna returned to her dish-water.

"Don't be in a hurry," she said.

"It's dreadful to have to fight against your own mother," said Katharine—"especially when you ought to love her, and when you can't move her. I'm so tired—I'm so dreadfully tired."

She walked out of the door. Joanna again drew her hands from the water. She gave them a violent shake over the sink, ran after Katharine, and hurriedly kissed her cheek.

"Don't you be discouraged," she said cheerfully. "It'll all come out right."

"Thank you so much," replied Katharine unsteadily. "I hope it will."

She went on along the road. The June sunshine enveloped her as she walked.

In the Damon kitchen, the girl washing dishes was thinking.

"It's so strange I never thought about her eyes before. And I do wish Deacon Grove wasn't so old. I s'pose 'tain't his fault that he's had so many wives. Any way, I sh'll always be a true friend to Kitty."

Nobody was surprised, after that first drive behind Marcellus Grove's colt, when it became known through Feeding Hills that he was to marry Colburn North's daughter, and that the marriage would take place on the afternoon of June 30th. Immediately after the ceremony the same colt, driven by a neighbor, was to take the pair to Riply, that they might go on to New York in the express train which stopped at Riply at half-past seven.

Mrs. North felt that she had done a good work. Of course her daughter had had some notions, but they had been overcome. Everything was all right. Beyond a few fierce, disjointed words, Colburn North had made no opposition.

He had watched his wife's face to good purpose for many years.

And now he carefully avoided looking at his daughter, or being alone with her for a moment.

If she came into the room where he was, he went away as soon as possible. But, furtively, his eyes would seek her face.

His own countenance showed that he was far from being happy.

When he was alone, he would occasionally swear with piratical ferocity, and apparently about nothing. His appetite also failed in a remarkable way. His wife ate as usual. She said that Colburn never was hungry this time of year, but that he always picked right up when "green sauce" began to come. Of course it wasn't to be expected that Katharine would seem as she ordinarily seemed; it would not be womanly if she did; and as for the girl's being doubt-

ful about being happy, that was womanly also. All girls felt that way; she should be sorry if Katharine was different.

Mrs. North discoursed thus on one occasion; she did not recur to the subject again—that was not her way. Her own manner was exactly the same as it had been since Katharine's memory of her extended. She went on thoughtfully looking after the creature comforts of her household, and never spoke a "cross word." She was very effective, also, in preparing for the wedding. In this preparation she was not aided in the least by the prospective bride.

The girl walked about the house silent and absorbed. She knew her wedding-day was fast approaching. Still, in the bottom of her heart, she felt that this thing could never happen. It was too dreadful. As we feel that though other people may die, we shall not.

Something would occur. Katharine thought that an earthquake would be a perfectly natural and reasonable convulsion to come in time to change her mother's plans. Any terrific throe of the world—she cared not what; let them all be swallowed up—all the people whom she knew, herself among them.

With the fatalistic superstition that sometimes forms part of an imaginative nature, Katharine almost began to rest on the belief that her marriage could not take place. There would be some miracle to prevent it.

Once she expressed this conviction to Joanna, and Joanna was so alarmed, and showed her alarm so plainly, that Katharine was almost angry.

"You see I can't help myself in the least," said Katharine, "and why shouldn't God help me? Perhaps I shall die before the thirtieth. Or perhaps Mr. Grove will die. He is older than I am; it may be that he will die."

"Oh, Kitty! You sound awful wicked," cried Joanna.

"I don't care if I do. I feel rather wicked. But I think God will be sorry enough for me to help in some way. I'd rather Mr. Grove would die than to die myself. I want to live long enough to be happy."

Joanna was helplessly silent for a while. Her friend was not looking at her; her eyes were fixed on the thick pine wood that covered a hill back of the Damon house. The two were sitting on the porch.

"Kitty, why don't you begin and like Mr. Grove, as long 's you're going to marry him?"

Katharine turned her face towards her friend.

"Begin and like him?" she repeated.

"Yes, indeed. It's the best thing you can do."

"Joanna," said the other solemnly, "don't you think I try to like him? I've been trying until it makes me sick to think of him. He's been thoughtful enough not to come to see me much. I'm grateful for that. Do you know," suddenly lowering her voice to a whisper, "that the papers sometimes tell how wives poison their husbands? You needn't look like that, Joanna. I sha'n't ever do such a thing. I'd a good deal rather poison myself. Only such things can be done. I've read of lots of such cases. I look at every paper to find them."

Joanna had risen to her feet. She laid her hands, almost violently, upon her companion.

"Kate!" she said. "Stop it! Don't marry him, then. Tell your mother how you feel. Goodness! I didn't know it was as bad as that. Why don't you go to the minister?"

"Don't you think I've told my mother?" exclaimed Katharine. "I might as well go and tell the grindstone in the shed. She says she knows best."

"Your father—" began Joanna desperately.

Kate smiled.

"I guess you don't know how 'tis at our house. And it won't do any good to tell you."

Joanna remained standing. She was thoroughly frightened. Her mind recurred to the minister. It seemed as if something must be done. Katharine now rose.

"I don't know what I should have done if I hadn't had you to talk to," she said.

She took Joanna's hands. Joanna, glancing at her friend's

face, suddenly began to cry with quickly increasing violence.

"Oh, don't! Don't!" eagerly exclaimed Katharine. She flung her arms about Joanna, and drew her close to her.

"I didn't know! I didn't know!" repeated Joanna between her sobs. "And oh, I'm afraid you'll poison somebody!"

"I sha'n't. You needn't worry about that. I was only talking. But I'm quite sure something will happen. God will help me, somehow."

God did not appear to help in the least. Nothing happened. The last day of June was like a day sent down from heaven to grace a happy marriage.

Since that interview on the porch, Joanna had been almost constantly with her friend.

She watched Katharine. She seemed afraid to have her out of sight.

On the morning of the day, Kate, looking from the window of Joanna's room, where she had spent the previous night, said that there were ten hours left now in which God might help her.

She spoke almost with cheerfulness. She continued in an undertone that if something did happen, she hoped she could then stop hating her mother.

III.

A POOR BEGINNING

It is curious how the human being, though he may call humanity in the aggregate a mass of worthlessness, whom God would be justified in not raising a hand to assist, yet always in his secret heart thinks he himself is worth helping, even though it should require a convulsion of nature to accomplish that assistance.

All through the day set for her wedding, Katharine North was upborne by this conviction, that the Ruler of heaven and earth would save her. The idea had taken possession of her. She went about the house with a face that quite satisfied her mother. Mrs. North was continually telling herself that girls didn't know what was good for them. She even informed her husband that she hoped he had a chance now to see how mistaken he had been.

Mr. North only grunted in response. In his own mind he was puzzled beyond expression. Once he followed Katharine into the best room. The girl was dusting the furniture for the last time before the ceremony, and before she went upstairs to begin to put on her gray travelling-suit. She was expecting Joanna every moment now. Joanna would "do" Kate's hair and otherwise assist.

Mr. North closed the door, and put his back against it. He felt a strange and distasteful inclination to cry, just as he had seen women cry, and had despised them for it.

"I'm glad your mother was right after all, Kitty," he said.

The girl looked questioningly at him.

She perceived his sympathy, and that perception made

her begin to tremble. There was a peculiar colorless glow over her face.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

She continued to gaze intently at her father, who answered her gaze.

She wondered what made her eyes burn so. They had burned for many days. But she had shed no tears. Now as she stood near her father, his face appeared to be multiplied in some strange way. Was that because she had not slept? It seemed a great while since she had slept.

"I mean that you are all right now about Grove, aren't you, Kitty? I do hope so. It's been a great trial to me. I want you always to remember that it's been a great trial to me."

Here Mr. North's inclination to weep became almost uncontrollable. He desired to take his daughter in his arms, but he knew that, if he touched her, he could not keep the tears back.

So he continued to stand straight against the door, and forced his hands to remain in his pockets.

"I don't want to marry Mr. Grove any more than I ever did," said Katharine. She was twisting the soft, old dusting-cloth back and forth as she spoke. And her eyes were upon her father. "I feel just the same as I ever did about it."

"Then why—" began Mr. North.

"I don't wonder you want to know," interrupted Katharine eagerly; "but you see I've been praying night and day, and I think I've had light. I'm almost sure God has heard me."

"And God is going to help you to like your husband, is he?"

Mr. North's voice was husky.

"Oh, no!" in surprise—"I don't know as even He could make me do that."

"What then?"

"He will prevent the marriage."

"Kitty!"

"Yes," calmly.

"But how?"

"The easiest way would be for one of us to die: Mr. Grove, or me, or—or mother. Or perhaps, at the last minute, Mr. Grove will change his mind. I explained to him how I felt, and asked him to tell mother that he wouldn't marry me."

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing could make him do that—"

"The ——!" began Mr. North, but he did not go on.

"But that I should be sure to like him after a little," continued the girl; "that a woman always became attached to her husband. Now I know better than that. That can't be true. Do you think so, father?"

But the man did not reply. He was trying to make up his mind to harness his horse, drive over to Deacon Grove's, and tell him that the marriage should not take place. Then he thought of his wife. And when he thought of her, he knew that he could do nothing. His face was almost as white as his daughter's.

He took a hand from his pocket, and began violently pulling the beard on his chin.

"I don't think God will kill anybody," he said at last. "The three people you mentioned seem in good health."

"But you know how suddenly one dies sometimes," persisted the girl.

"Kitty," cried the man, who was almost beside himself, "don't you go and reckon on anything like that. Nothing will happen."

Katharine dropped her dust-cloth, and came close to her father. She took hold of the lapels of his coat, and leaned up against him.

"But I've prayed so. You don't know how I've prayed. Don't you think God answers prayer?"

"Oh, I don't know."

The man's voice broke on the last word. His eyes were dim. In a moment, tears fell from them.

Katharine put her head down on her father's breast.

She was greatly shocked, but she could not give up her hope.

"Poor little Kitty! Poor little Kitty!" whispered Mr. North.

Then he tried to say that everything was for the best, and that Mr. Grove was a very good man.

But the words stuck in his throat. He gave up the attempt.

He stood in silence, and held his daughter close to him.

"Katharine! Katharine! Ain't you got the parlor dusted yet? I see Joanna just starting from her house."

The voice came from the front entry. Steps followed it.

Kate started. She stooped, and picked up her dust-cloth.

"Yes, mother," she said, "I'm all through."

Colburn North walked quickly from the house.

He was trying to tell himself that perhaps his wife was right. Nobody could be sure she wasn't right, and she was sure she was. And really there wasn't a thing against Marcellus Grove—not a thing. He never took another wife until the preceding one was dead and buried.

And he was particular to wear a weed on his hat in the interregnums. Besides, the deacon was always spoken well of.

Joanna, in the process of doing her friend's hair and helping with her toilet, was much more "worked up," apparently, than Katharine.

Joanna wanted to ask if the subject of poisoning had been forgotten, but she did not dare to do so, lest it might be forgotten and she would thus recall it.

When Katharine had just donned the gray dress, some one knocked at the door of her room.

"It can't be time," she exclaimed.

She opened the door. Her father stood there, in his best suit.

He pulled his daughter outside.

"Grove has just come," he said excitedly. "I wanted

to tell you, Kitty, that God isn't going to interfere. You mustn't count on it. And—and—don't forget that your father's your friend always."

"No, no. How could I?"

Katharine put her arms round her father's neck, and kissed him.

"It's a damned business," he was saying over and over.

When he saw his wife, in her black silk gown, going to the front room to meet the minister, he almost wanted to throttle her.

And yet, could it be that she was right?

He had lived long enough to have learned that most unpromising affairs sometimes turned out well. Still, he felt that it was enough that the girl did not want to marry that man.

The nearest relatives, perhaps a score of people, and the Damon family were all the guests that had been invited.

At the appointed hour the minister rose, and remarked that he presumed that the time had arrived in which he was to perform a very pleasant duty. Would the parties please take their places?

Mr. Grove immediately obeyed this request. And there was no appreciable delay in the appearance of Katharine beside him. Her mother had kept close to her, and now led her forward.

Brides are privileged to have any strange expression.

That this bride's face was utterly white, even to the lips, was remarked upon afterwards. That she did not speak in response to the usual questions was not particularly noticed.

Brides are not usually very likely to give loud, clear replies. A shy silence is all that is necessary. And the bridegroom's voice was in resonant condition.

Directly after the ceremony, Katharine turned her face towards her mother. That look was something that her mother wished she might forget.

There was no time to lose before starting for Riply to catch the New York train.

The bride must put on her hat and gloves. The groom

was glancing at his watch. Katharine hastened noiselessly towards her room. Joanna was already there, waiting to give the last assistance. She was very glad it was over. And it had passed off very well. Only she hadn't liked the expression on her friend's face. But her friend was liable to be odd, and she had been suffering of late. Everything would be right now.

Joanna took up Katharine's bonnet from the bed, where it lay with her gloves and her light summer wrap. She bent a bow into place; she nipped the petals of a pink sweet-pea into a different shape. She thought she would have sweet-peas on her own wedding-bonnet—that is, if it should be the season for them.

Presently she went to the door, and looked down the stairway.

People were passing in and out of the door, talking and laughing and joking. She heard Mr. Grove's colt stamp impatiently in the yard close to the house.

There was a rustle of stiff silk, and Mrs. North appeared at the foot of the stairs. She looked up.

"Joanna," she said, "tell Katharine there is not a minute to lose. She must come right down."

"She isn't here," was the answer.

"What?"

"She isn't here."

Mrs. North immediately labored up the stairs, as if she could find her daughter by coming to her room.

Outside, Mr. Grove was standing at the colt's head. He was continually taking out his watch, and looking at it. He was also trying to reply to the remarks the neighbors made to him.

"Even your colt can't do it if she don't come pretty quick," said one.

"You know it takes time for a bride to put on her bunnit," said another.

"Oh, I guess it's all right," remarked Deacon Grove with an easy air.

For the third time he arranged the lap-robes in front of the seats. The hand-satchels were in place. The man who was to drive was also in his place: he was sitting on the "driver's side," leaning his elbows on his knees, with the reins held loosely in his hands.

"If she isn't here in another minute," he was now saying, "nothing less 'n chain lightning can get you to the deepo. There ain't any other train, is there?"

"Not to-night," said the deacon.

He thrust his watch into his pocket with rather a pronounced movement. It almost began to seem to him as if he were being made ridiculous. He did not enjoy that possibility.

"Mr. Grove." It was Mrs. North who spoke to him from the open door. "Will you please come here?"

The man hurried up the path. There would be no starting for New York that night.

Mrs. North was rather pale. Her large face had something like a flabby appearance.

"Mr. Grove," she said, "I don't think Katharine is quite well. I'm afraid you'll have to put off your journey."

"Where is she?"

"She's been in a nervous state for some time. Though she is naturally a strong girl," went on Mrs. North, as if the other had not spoken.

"Where is she?" he asked again. This time with a masterful air that was not usually apparent.

But Mrs. North was walking away. As she moved she said she would tell the folks that Katharine was not quite well.

Mr. Grove gazed about him in search of Colburn North, who, being a man, might be made to give an answer different from what that infernal woman kept saying.

But he did not see Colburn North. Let them call the girl sick then, if they wanted to; but he wasn't going to be made ridiculous.

In truth, Katharine's father had gone across the road to

the barn. He didn't want to hear the people gabbling. When his daughter appeared to get into the carriage, he would come and say good-by to her. God had not answered her prayers.

The guests began to disperse after hearing what Mrs. North had to say. She told them that Katharine would not be able to leave that night; that, though usually strong, when she was over-tired the girl was sometimes subject to these attacks.

Mrs. North was thinking that she had told no downright lie. She did not believe in lying. And she was suffering very much herself. She could not see her way before her in the least. Katharine was odd. She took after her Aunt Kate.

In the bottom of the woman's mind was the thought of the pond in the hollow beyond the pine-covered ridge of high ground back of the house.

She remembered her daughter's face as she had left the room. There was a path, not a quarter of a mile long, that led from the yard straight to that pond.

Mrs. North wished she had not thought of such a thing.

In five minutes the people were all gone, driving and walking away through the beautiful June twilight. Among them went the driver who was to have brought back the colt from the station.

Mr. Grove stood leaning against the fence in a careless attitude until they had gone. Then he took his horse by the bridle and led him towards the barn.

Mr. North appeared in the wide, open space left by the barn-door.

The two men looked at each other for an instant with uncontrolled ferocity. Then both pulled themselves together.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. North. "You know you've missed the train. Where's Kitty?"

"Yes, I know I've missed the train. I understand from

your wife that Kate is not well. I'll be— I don't think I understand anything about it."

The deacon shut his lips savagely under his long moustache. He was suspicious of something, he knew not what. This was a different kind of a wedding from any he had ever acted in before. He was getting more and more resentful with every moment.

Mr. North stood an instant in silence. Then he went across the road to the house in a very few strides. The bridegroom was close behind him.

The two men entered and mounted the stairs. At the door of Katharine's room they were met by Katharine's mother.

Behind that portly form was standing Joanna Damon, who was crying audibly and wringing her hands.

The men were tall, and could look over the heads of the women. They saw that, besides those two, there was no one else in the chamber. And they saw the gray bonnet and gloves and wrap on the bed.

Mr. North took hold of his wife's arm, so that she shrank. He did not ask any question. He held her tighter and tighter, and kept his haggard eyes on her.

Mr. Grove stood in the middle of the room. He did not ask any question, either. But his face was not pleasant to see.

What Katharine had really done, however, seemed very simple to her, and entirely without melodramatic intentions. Indeed, her intentions did not then extend any further than the immediate hour. She was suddenly dominated by a wild longing for a moment's respite. Only a moment—and that she must have. She forgot the train for New York.

God had not helped her, after all. Nothing could ever come into her life to cause her to pray as she had prayed during the last week. And since such prayer had not been answered, why should she ever pray again?

When she left the best room after the ceremony, instead of going upstairs to her own room, as had been her inten-

tion, she had passed along the narrow entry to the rear door, which was open.

She thought she would go out once more, only for an instant. Everybody was in the front of the house. No one saw her.

The whole world was one bower of loveliness on that June afternoon.

Katharine walked on swiftly. She felt the loveliness smite her with keen pain. It was like a too-bright light upon eyes not strong.

Unconsciously she took the path which ran beside a fence through the wide strip of "mowing" which separated her home from the Damon house. This was the path often traversed by the two girls. It was every way better than going "round the road."

Once Katharine turned with the thought of going back. The low sun came full in her face as she gazed at her home.

"It's no use," she said—"I can't go back now. Not just now."

She raised her eyes to the sweetness of the blue heavens.

"God did not care about me, after all. Perhaps he doesn't really care for any of us."

She ran along the path. The tall grass swished against her skirts, and the odor of the clover came up strongly.

The Damon house was empty and locked, for the Damons were at the wedding. But Katharine knew that the key was under the right-hand half of the pantry window-blind. So she let herself in. She went directly to Joanna's room.

She sat down on the side of the bed. All at once she was aware that she was very weary. She was so weary that it seemed impossible to keep her head from going down on the pillow.

The reaction from the nights when she could not sleep came with resistless power. The demand that youth makes for recuperation is absolutely imperative.

Katharine had been upheld and stimulated by the belief that she would have help. There was nothing left now.

With the movement of an exhausted child, she turned towards the pillow, laid herself down, and was immediately asleep.

She had never given herself any trouble about the details of her marriage, and it did not trouble her now that the express-train would be missed.

She had an indefinite intention that she would return to the house in a few moments. Of course she must return.

Mr. and Mrs. Damon came back to their home thinking Katharine was ill. It was natural that Joanna should remain longer, for Joanna was considered to be Katharine's most intimate friend.

"'Tain't begun well," remarked Mr. Damon, "and I ain't surprised."

"A bad beginning makes a good ending sometimes," responded his wife. "I wonder what really ails Kate. And you forgot to lock the door, after all."

Mrs. Damon was smoothing her best handkerchief, which she had carried in her hand. By using a little care this handkerchief need not go into the wash until it had accompanied her to meeting several times. Washing wore out such things even more than using them.

"Ails her!" repeated Mr. Damon, who was divesting himself of his "dress-up" necktie. "You must be a fool not to know she's been plagued to death about marrying Grove. Has she got a notion for somebody else, do you know?"

"I guess not. I never heard of anybody's going with her at all."

"'Tain't that, then."

Mr. Damon had now wrenched his tie and his collar in a destructive way from his neck, and flung them on the table before him.

He had deferred the doing of his "chores" until after the wedding; and he now dressed himself for the barn, and left his wife to take care of his discarded fine clothes.

When it drew near ten o'clock, Mrs. Damon had serious

thoughts of going over to Mr. North's and making inquiries. She saw lights moving about the house there in an unusual way. She wondered if they had sent for the doctor. She couldn't remember to have heard that Katharine was subject to "attacks" of any kind. Mrs. North had spoken as if such was the case.

At a little after ten, she had gone to the door for another look at her neighbor's house. She saw a figure hurrying along the road; she knew in a moment it was Joanna.

When the girl came into the lighted sitting-room, she looked so white and wild-eyed that her mother asked excitedly,

"Is she dead?"

"Oh, no. I—I don't think she is dead."

Joanna sat down quickly.

She had promised before leaving that she would not tell that Katharine had gone away—that she would keep it a secret until the next day. It was Deacon Grove who had exacted this promise, in the hope that his wife would appear at any moment.

And this freak of hers reflected upon him so severely that he swore inwardly a great deal during the few hours following his wedding.

His oaths had a dangerously close reference to the person of the missing girl. She was making a fool of him. And he was not, he told himself, at all the kind of man who would bear being made a fool of. He wasn't used to it; and he did not propose to become used to it, either.

But he was not such a brute but that a softer feeling sometimes came strongly to him, and he was alarmed then as to what had become of Katharine.

When Joanna said that she didn't think her friend was dead, her mother's jaw dropped in the extremity of her anxiety and terror.

"Is she laying unconscious?" she asked.

Joanna began to wring her hands.

"Don't ask me! I can't tell! No, she ain't unconscious," was the amazing reply.

"Have they sent for the doctor?"

"No, they hadn't when I came away."

"I hope you ain't crazy, Joanna?"

Her mother said this severely, and her daughter directly fell to wringing her hands again.

She said she didn't know whether she was crazy or not, but she thought 's likely 's not she should be soon.

"Don't you ask me another thing, mother," she continued, "for I ain't got anything to tell. And I'm going to bed now."

The girl rose, and abruptly left the room.

But Mrs. Damon was a woman who did not "take things so hard" as to affect her too seriously. She found it quite possible to join her husband in the manifestation of sound sleep which he was giving forth in the bedroom.

As Joanna went slowly up the stairs, she was thinking that she couldn't help wishing that Kitty wasn't so odd. As long as she was going to marry Deacon Grove, why did she act in this way?

When she had been afraid Katharine had drowned herself, Joanna had felt no reproof, only terror and grief. But now, when Mr. Grove and Mr. North had been to the pond, and carefully examined the path and the banks, returning with an almost positive assurance that the girl had not been there, Joanna was inclined to be indignant.

At this stage of her emotions she opened the door of her own room, and entered it.

Although the place was almost dark, the June night shed sufficient radiance for her young eyes to detect the figure on her bed, and for her to recognize it; though the recognition must have come from some intuitive sense.

Katharine had slept profoundly ever since she had put her head on the pillow. But she was not a heavy sleeper.

Before Joanna, in her great surprise, could speak, Katharine said softly,

"Is that you?"

"Yes, it is," was the prompt reply—"and I must say you've done it for once. Have you been here all the time?"

"Yes, I came here directly. Has Mr. Grove gone to New York?"

Katharine sat up, and put both hands to her forehead, sweeping the hair from her face.

"I guess not. They've been down to the pond for you," was the dry answer.

"The pond? Oh, I never thought of that! Has father been worrying?"

"Yes, he has."

For some reason Joanna felt her anger melting away, she could not tell why.

She came and sat down on the bed beside her friend. Katharine took her hand, and, moving nearer, she put her head on Joanna's shoulder.

"I didn't think of coming here until I came," she said. "I had to be alone for a few moments. And then all at once I was so tired that I thought I should die if I didn't sleep."

She drew a deep breath, and pressed her face close into Joanna's neck.

There was now a long silence. Joanna was trying to suggest that Katharine should go home. But she could not quite bring herself to say the words.

It was Katharine who spoke first.

"I wish my father knew I was safe," she said.

Joanna waited before she remarked that perhaps Kitty might better go and tell her father.

Katharine shuddered faintly. "If you don't care, I think I'll stay here until morning. Then my mind will be clearer. I feel stupefied, somehow. But I do wish father knew. Would you—would you, Joanna, very much mind going back and telling father?"

IV.

KATHARINE AND HER FATHER

JOANNA stood silent for a moment after her friend had made this request. She felt that Katharine was asking a good deal, and she also felt that she herself ought to be more angry than she was. What a time there had been over at the North house! The idea of a bride's going off in that way! Katharine did not seem to have much sense of what she had done.

Joanna was confused.

"I wish you would tell father—only father."

Katharine spoke piteously. And she pressed her hot face again into her companion's neck.

Joanna wavered.

"But how can I?" she said. "Do you want anybody else to know?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"I guess I sh'll find it kind of hard work," remarked Joanna. "Your mother 'n' Mr. Grove 'll be curious enough about what I tell your father. Kitty, I do think you've acted kind of unreasonable—can't you see it yourself?"

Katharine did not reply. She only clung closer and shuddered. In a moment she said,

"You don't feel as if you could tell father, then?"

"I'll try."

"Perhaps you can see him and not let the others know it."

"And perhaps I can't. But I'll do 's well 's I can."

"And don't you tell any one else."

"No."

Now Katharine drew away. But she held on to Joanna's hand.

"Of course you don't want me to stay here," she said. "I truly didn't think how strange it was when I came. I'll go away if you say so, Joanna."

"Will you go back with me?" eagerly.

But Katharine shrank.

"I couldn't see mother or Mr. Grove again to-night. I couldn't," she answered.

There was a certain savage emphasis in her voice which brought Joanna to terms immediately.

"I'll go; I'll go," she hastened to say.

Katharine turned towards the bed again.

"I'll lie down. I didn't know I was so tired," she said. "I knew I hadn't slept. But I think the real reason for my weariness is that God has not cared anything about me. Don't you think so, Joanna?" pausing in the dusk and turning towards her friend.

Joanna felt a sob rising in her throat as she heard the words.

She swallowed the sob as she came towards the bed.

"You just lie right down, Kitty," she said soothingly; "and don't you worry. I'll tell your father somehow, and the rest sha'n't know."

She put a thin coverlid carefully over her friend. Kitty laid herself down. But she rose immediately on her elbow as she whispered,

"I suppose you think you've got religion, Joanna, don't you?"

"I hope so."

"I thought so, too, you know, when I joined the church with you, Joanna, last year. But I don't think so any more. And I don't care, either, if I haven't. I don't care a thing about it. Nor for anything in the world. Only a little for father. You tell father."

"Yes, yes. You have a nice nap. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Katharine did not answer. She had dropped her head on the pillow and closed her eyes. She felt herself being borne off upon a blessed wave of sleep.

As for Joanna, she went noiselessly down the stairs. Through the open doors she heard the combined snoring of her parents.

She took her mother's shawl from its peg in the entry, pinned it over her head, and stepped out into the night, which was odorous and vocal with summer flowers and summer insects.

But the girl could not think of anything save her errand. The grass was so heavy with dew that she hastened into the road, where even the dust was damp with the night moisture. She ran until she came close to Katharine's home. The lights were still burning there, and she saw figures moving about.

She did not know in the least how she should give her message. Then she bethought herself that it would be only natural that she should come to inquire about Katharine. But straightforward, outspoken Joanna did not relish her position.

She opened the outer door and held it in her hand while she called,

"Mr. North, have you heard anything from her?"

To herself she was saying,

"Oh, what shall I do if one of the others should come?"

But it was Mr. North who strode forward in his shirt-sleeves.

"Have you heard anything?" repeated Joanna, aloud, despising herself for what seemed to her what one might call a Machiavelian kind of proceeding.

She reached forward as she spoke and seized Mr. North's hand.

"She's safe in my room. She don't want you to speak of it," she whispered.

The man's face changed to such a look of relief, almost of happiness, that Joanna whispered again,

"Don't go and look like that! Why don't you tell me if you've heard from her?"

For Mrs. North was now coming towards the two.

The father turned his head from his wife. He made a great effort, and said,

"No, we hadn't heard."

"Is that you, Joanna?" inquired Mrs. North as her husband walked quickly away. "This is a dreadful trial. I don't know what I've done to have a child act so."

Joanna was silent.

Mrs. North went on, her thick, throaty voice giving a dull emphasis to her words. "I think they ought to be scouring the country. I say something 's happened to keep her somewhere. It was odd that she went anywhere; but I say something 's keeping her."

"Why don't you scour the country then?" asked Joanna.

She felt a great load of deceit upon her as she stood there and asked that question, knowing as she did that Katharine was asleep on her own bed.

"Why don't I?" repeated Mrs. North, her anxious eyes fixing themselves on the girl's face. "What can a poor woman do against two men? Besides, she's Deacon Grove's wife now. He says wait. Deacon Grove's a man that's going to have his own way, I guess."

There was something piteous about the heavy person of Katharine's mother as she spoke thus.

Notwithstanding Mr. Grove's devotion to his whiskers, and his weakness for cologne water on his handkerchief, he was a person who, like Mrs. North, wished to have his own way, and he had thus far in his life usually been able to gratify that wish.

He was at this moment standing just within the door of the sitting-room. His hands were clasped behind him. There was a black look all over his face.

"What are those two women talking about?" he was asking himself; "and why the devil are women always talking, anyway?"

He advanced a few steps towards them. As he did so, Joanna turned abruptly and ran down towards the road. She was afraid he would put some question that would make it seem necessary for her to tell a falsehood.

She was not an imaginative person in the least, but she felt, as she again softly mounted the stairs to her chamber, that she was in the very centre of those novels that she had heard about, but never read. This situation of affairs must certainly be like a novel. And she told herself that she was "most crazy to see how it would turn out." There was something about Katharine, somehow, that made Joanna feel as if the turning-out was extremely uncertain.

Perhaps Katharine was going to have a fever. It seemed to Joanna under the circumstances that to have a fever was the very best thing Katharine could do.

"Then," said Joanna, half aloud, "of course she won't have it. You can't expect her to do what any other person would do."

This time the girl lying on the bed did not waken.

Joanna hardly dared to breathe. She tiptoed about for a moment. Then she gave up all thoughts of taking off her clothes. She stretched herself carefully by her friend's side.

Katharine moved slightly. She extended one hand, and when it had found Joanna's cheek she gave a long, tremulous sigh. Then she sank again into a deep sleep.

But Joanna did not sleep. She had not been awake for many nights previous until exhaustion had come. She lay stiff and straight, holding Katharine's hand.

The outcome of all her thoughts was that, of course, Kitty would go back to her home as soon as it was light. There was nothing else to be done.

And it is light very early on the first day of July.

Joanna must have fallen asleep at last, for when she became conscious her companion was sitting upon the side of the bed, looking down at her.

Joanna confusedly sat up, staring.

"Hush!" said Katharine. "Don't make a noise. No one is up yet. It's only a little after four."

Joanna still stared stupidly and persistently at the face near her.

"And you haven't got a fever?" she said at last.

"A fever? No—I think I'm perfectly well."

"I didn't know—I thought p'r'aps—" began Joanna; then she stopped before the eyes fixed upon her.

"I know what you mean now," Katharine said. "I certainly ought to have gone into a brain fever and died. But you see, Joanna, we so seldom do the things we ought to do."

"Oh," said the other distressfully, "I don't think I meant that exactly. But oh, Kitty, what are you going to do? Folks 'll be up in a little while now. Father 'n' mother always get up awfully early this time of year."

Katharine rose from the bed and went to the little looking-glass with the involuntary movement which is so feminine, and which often comes to the surface in the midst of the deepest and most disastrous confusion.

But she did not look confused now. She was still so young that mere rest was not only a tonic, but an actual respite to her.

She took Joanna's hair-brush, and brushed her hair vigorously a few times. Then she turned towards the bed on which her friend had remained seated, with her eyes fixed upon her guest.

"Don't worry," she said. "Let me stay here a few minutes; then I'll go."

"But what are you going to do, Kitty? Do tell me."

Katharine gazed steadily right through her friend, as if Joanna had been air.

"Why don't you ask me what I'm not going to do?" she said at length.

"Well, what ain't you going to do?"

Katharine laid down her hair-brush. She turned towards her friend again. Her movements were so extremely

quiet that, under the circumstances, they were almost startling.

"I'm not going back to that man," she said.

Joanna clasped her hands.

"Oh, Kitty!" she cried helplessly. In a moment her strong common-sense came to her aid. "If you feel like that, why didn't you—oh, for mercy's sake! why didn't you —stop it before? You're married to him now."

"It was mother. It was mother. She has such a power over me. And I was worn out. And I trusted in God. I sha'n't trust in God any more. I'm going to trust in myself now."

Joanna could only make some kind of an exclamation at this. As soon as she could she said she did wish Kitty would see the minister.

"There isn't the slightest need of the minister," was the answer.

"But where are you going, if you ain't going to Mr. Grove?"

"I shall go right home. I want to see my father."

"But—but—" began Joanna, feebly wringing her hands.

"You've been so good to me," said Katharine, interrupting. She went to her friend, and put her arm over the girl's shoulder. She drew back her head, that she might look the more fully into the commonplace, honest face before her. "Yes, you've been so good to me. I sha'n't forget it."

She kissed her friend lightly but tenderly on the lips.

She walked towards the door. She looked back to say, "Don't you worry a bit about me."

Joanna started up frantically.

"But what'll become of you? Oh, what'll become of you?" she cried.

Katharine smiled.

"You know I've got my father." She paused a moment. Then she said, "and I've got myself."

She went down the stairs almost noiselessly, and let

herself out into the wonderful joy of the new summer day.

An absolute tangle of bird-songs was in the air. A subtle fragrance seemed to come from everything.

Triumph, hope, happiness—all rode upon the west wind which fluttered in Katharine's hair and breathed on her cheeks.

The pride of life, the unconquerable "appetite for joy," the red blood in her body, the breath of her nostrils—all there was of her, she thought, sprang up and clamored for full, unrepressed life.

A courage born of rest and youth, and some indescribable change which had come to her, made her fling up her head strongly to meet this new day.

She walked towards the road on her way home. She had only reached the clump of lilacs when Mr. North stepped from behind the shrubs.

"Kitty," he said.

The girl turned. She looked at him an instant as if her eyes must be deceiving her. She began to sob.

Colburn North suddenly took her in his arms and went quickly with his burden down the slope of the yard to the other side of a row of young willows.

"This is all Roxy's work," he was saying dully to himself. "She has ruined my girl—my little girl."

And he also sobbed, dryly and hardly, as a man may do.

He put his child on her feet. He held her head to his breast, while he said again and again,

"Father's own girlie! Father's chicken! They sha'n't abuse her!"

He had never been so moved in his life. He had not known he could be so moved. He had known that the only thing in the world which was precious to him was this child. Still, he had not been aware of this heretofore save in that dim, accustomed way in which we view our daily blessings.

Katharine lay in quiet in her father's arms. He had

never been demonstrative. She had always had a sense that he cared a good deal for her, but never like this. She was naturally demonstrative herself, or rather she had it in her to be so, should she ever have the occasion. Thus, this moment with her father was very precious to her, great though the price had been by which she had secured it.

After a long time she raised her head.

"I was coming to see you," she said.

"Shall we go home now?" he asked.

"Not quite yet. I want to think." She removed herself from his arms, but she still held his hand closely.

She was looking over the vivid, glittering meadow which swept up from the hollow towards the uplands beyond. Wings of a hundred different birds flashed in the light. A bank of dense, glorified mist was lying close down upon the meadow, and it was reaching transparent, wavering sprays upward towards the sunlight.

While the girl looked off thus, the man looked at her. He was thinking he had not known her face before—or was it changed? He was thinking also that this was not the kind of a person to live with a woman like his wife. He could bear it well enough. He was at that age when a man cares a good deal for the way his beefsteak is cooked, and for the kind of chair he sits in of an evening when he reads his paper.

Katharine now turned towards him.

"Isn't it lovely?" she exclaimed softly. "Do you suppose people get so they don't care for anything like that?"

Mr. North did not reply, save by a quick nod of his head.

He was glad they were sheltered by the row of young willows. He did not want Enoch Damon to come blundering upon them. Still, he disliked to hasten the girl in any way.

But Katharine did not dwell upon the scene before her.

"Father," she said quickly, "have you ever been happy?"

Mr. North almost grew pale with the suddenness of this question, and he felt it very difficult to answer.

His mind flashed back over his life. It suddenly fastened upon one episode—a few brief weeks. And as his mind paused upon that memory, his middle-aged heart gave a strange leap.

"Yes," cried his daughter, who was watching his face, "you have been happy. Was it before you knew mother?"

Mr. North's toughened cheeks reddened a little as he said,

"Yes."

Katharine silently gazed at him. She thought there were a great many things that would make her happy. Chief among them was freedom. You see, she was very young and very susceptible.

Involuntarily we who have some years on our heads pity those who are susceptible as well as young.

Why not rejoice with them? They have a deep cup from which to drink. Surely there will be something rapturous in that cup. And rapture is remembered long after pain is forgotten. Clods do not suffer. Neither are they happy.

Vaguely, and yet deeply, Katharine was thinking something like this as she stood there looking up into her father's face. That face had a different aspect from any she had ever seen there before.

Upon this silence between them there came the clear, metallic sound of the Damon clock striking five. And immediately, Mr. Damon's voice asked stridently "where the milk-pail had been put."

Katharine started. Her cheeks became red.

"I had forgotten," she cried. "Oh, how could I forget, even for a minute? It was because I was so glad to see you, father? You'll help me, won't you? You'll tell me what to do?"

Mr. North's eyes clouded over. He told himself he was in a hard place. All the years during which he had administered the town business had not given him the slightest experience which could serve him in the affairs of this child, who was, all at once, as if by a miracle, grown up and ca-

pable of having affairs of her own of the most puzzling kind.

"You'll help me, won't you, father?" repeated the girl, with a clinging movement towards her companion.

Mr. North stirred uneasily.

"I don't know what your mother will think about it," he said slowly. A baffled, rebellious expression came to his face as he spoke. "Perhaps she is right, Kitty."

Katharine's look hardened.

"I am not afraid of mother any more."

She spoke with great distinctness.

She dropped her father's hand.

"I never shall be afraid of her again," she went on. "I feel differently about her. Oh, if I only could have felt so before—before—"

She stopped, shuddering violently.

"Of course she won't let me live at home any more," she said. "I want you to help me to think where to go, father."

"But Grove, you know, Kitty?" began Mr. North, feeling in some way that he himself was not of "much account."

Katharine fixed her clear eyes on her father's troubled ones.

"I shall explain to Mr. Grove, father. I shall explain somehow—I can't tell exactly how. I dread it"—another shudder—"but I've got to do it. And I don't in the least care what mother thinks."

"You don't seem to know, Kitty, that Grove is a very determined man?"

"Yes, I do."

"And that he thinks you've made him ridiculous?"

"I'm sorry if he thinks that. Come, shall we go up to the house? You be thinking, father, of some plan for me."

She took his hand, and the two began to walk over the wet grass towards the girl's home.

Mr. North could not help groaning aloud.

"You don't know anything about anything, Kitty," he said. "You seem to think you've only got to say how things shall be, and they'll be so."

Katharine shook her head.

"No, I don't," she answered. She half paused in her walk. Her grasp on her father's hand tightened.

"There comes Mr. Grove," she said.

The man had left the house, where he had kept a sleepless vigil of watching and waiting. He was walking slowly along, with his head bent and his hands behind him. His beard hung rather unkempt. He was wondering what on earth he should do, now it had "come day" again.

Presently he lifted his head, and he saw Katharine and her father coming to meet him.

The first masculine impulse in such a moment of surprise is usually to utter an oath. Deacon Grove yielded to that impulse, though under his breath.

He was so confounded and confused that his vanity rose tumultuously to arms.

By the expression on his face, one might have said that he had been Katharine's husband a few years rather than a few hours.

Now Colburn North was not afraid of anything but his wife. So it was with great decision that he said,

"Grove, it won't do any good to look like that. You'd better drop that. And the sooner the better."

Mr. Grove stood with his feet planted at some distance from each other. And he swayed back and forth as he stood and stared a moment before he said:

"So you were in the secret, North? If you weren't Kate's father I'd thrash you."

"Oh, no, I guess not," said Mr. North. "I guess you wouldn't thrash me very bad. And we need not fight like two curs, either. I wasn't exactly in the secret. But Kittie spent last night with her friend Joanna; and she did send me word, because she thought I'd worry. And I kept the secret for her till this morning. It's been a hard time for

us all, Grove, and for her most of all. It's been a great mistake. I don't know what's going to be done about it. You knew she didn't want you, Grove. What made you keep on? Weren't there women enough, in the devil's name! so that you needn't have tormented this child?"

There was a good deal of concentrated power in Mr. North's voice, and there was an extremely exasperating flavor of truth, particularly in that last remark.

Mr. Grove stood glowering a moment. Katharine was just behind her father. Her eyes were lowered, and her hands hung loosely clasped before her. As her husband glanced at her, he had every reason to think, from her appearance, that he would be able with tolerable ease to impress his will upon her. And it was hardly in the nature of any man, save that "double-dyed villain" of whom we used to read, to look upon her now without a great softening of the heart.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Mr. North," said Grove, with unexpected mildness. "I guess we can fix matters up all right between us. Kate, I hope this freak of yours isn't known to a great many people. Is it?"

"Only to Joanna."

"Can you make her hold her tongue, do you think?"

"She won't tell."

"All right, then. The other folks think you were sick—a fit of the nerves, or something. Let's drop the whole thing now, Kate. I never'll throw it up at you. Girls are queer enough, any way"—with fine masculine magnanimity. "We'll start off this morning. Your father 'll drive us over to Riply. New York won't be a bit the worse. You shall have a good time, Kate, if I can manage it."

Deacon Grove had now drawn himself up to his full height, and had broadened his shoulders in a way he had. His face was very pleasant as he turned it towards his wife. He was conscious of that feeling of satisfaction and exhilaration which sometimes comes to one who has just given a full and free forgiveness.

Mr. North glanced uneasily at his daughter, whose head still hung down slightly, and whose hands were still clasped.

"We'd better go up to the house. Your mother is so anxious, Kitty," he said.

The three started on. Mr. Grove ranged himself by Katharine's side. As he walked beside her he was conscious of the swift growth of a stinging, tantalizing anger that seemed to creep up his spine and diffuse itself all through his brain in a maddening way.

Why didn't she show an instant and effusive sense of gratitude for his forgiveness? It was very strange. A man does not like to do a noble and generous thing and not have it appreciated in any degree.

Certainly he had never had a wife in the least like this girl, whom he now contemplated in angry wonder.

Mrs. North had seen them coming. She had remained behind that she might subdue a very unaccustomed inclination to shed tears. Having overcome this inclination, she began to feel that smouldering, sullen indignation which is the rage of some people.

She advanced to the screen-door, and opened it.

"Well," she said, "I must say this is a pretty how-de-do! Where 'd you find that child, Colburn?"

Katharine came to the front. It was she who answered.

"I was at Joanna's."

"You'd better come in now, and behave like a human being—if you can."

Katharine obeyed—that is, so far as to go in. The two men followed her. It was amazing to the girl to find that she could look at her mother unflinchingly. Her slight figure was rigid with resolve.

Mr. Grove was gradually growing pale. He took out his watch and studied the dial. Then he thrust it back into his pocket, and said, rather loudly, that there was plenty of time. The train didn't stop at Riply until eight.

Katharine turned towards him.

"Mr. Grove," she said, "you have been very kind. But I can't go to New York with you."

V.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING

When her daughter spoke like that, Mrs. North knew that, until this moment, she had never been really surprised.

She looked around for a convenient chair in which to deposit her bulky form, which suddenly weighed heavily upon her.

She even had a fleeting thought that she would tell Colburn to bring her the "camphire." Only, as she knew, she had never been a camphire kind of a woman, and she did not wish to begin now to become one.

Marcellus Grove heard his wife say she could not go to New York with him, and with the hearing there came to him the piercing sense that, in case she persisted, the whole affair would "get out," and he should be ridiculous.

This was his first thought, but instantly there trooped to it a hundred other thoughts and emotions which rioted confusedly in his consciousness.

Still paramount was the feeling that the heavens might fall rather than that Marcellus Grove should be ridiculous.

And men were not in the habit in these days of whipping their wives. At least he was not aware that they whipped them in Feeding Hills. Perhaps he might set an example. He had no doubt but that there were several husbands right in his own parish who would hail such a precedent with delight. But when the wife was a young girl just married, you could not quite reckon on how the men might look upon such a castigation. Human nature was so uncertain.

While these thoughts were holding a dreadful carnival

in his brain, Deacon Grove was standing in front of his wife, who did not seem to wish to look at him.

Without really knowing that he had done so, Mr. Grove was now aware that he had been reckoning on the marriage ceremony to produce a more or less decided revulsion of attitude in Katharine's mind towards him. He was not, perhaps, to be blamed for having a great deal of faith in the powers of the marriage ceremony, considering his experience.

Mr. North leaned against the wall of the sitting-room. He rubbed his head against the paper behind him. And his wife did not reprove him for the action.

At last, from sheer inability to say anything different, Mr. Grove repeated his remark,

"There's plenty of time. The morning express doesn't stop at Riply till eight."

Mrs. North had a hand on each arm of her chair. She leaned a good many pounds on these chair-arms as she bent forward towards her daughter and said,

"Kate, you hear what your husband says? I hope you'll be ready this time. And be grateful you've got a husband willing to forgive you."

Then the woman's heart felt some curious, unaccustomed pulse, something which had nothing whatever to do with the fact that she had always taken such good care of this child from the days of the croup to the present time.

"Kate," she said anxiously, "ain't you well? You look kind of feverish, somehow."

A physical ailment she could instantly look upon with consideration. She understood that the body might suffer.

The girl felt an impersonal impulse to smile. She remembered how Joanna had suggested the advisability of a fever at this juncture.

"I am very well," she answered.

"Then I s'pose you'll be ready to ketch that express," responded her mother.

But Katharine did not reply to this remark. She looked at Mr. Grove and answered his words.

"You know I said I was not going to New York with you."

A red spot now came to each cheek.

"But—but—" Mr. Grove stammered, "but I've got to go."

"I don't mean to go anywhere with you."

"What?"

Katharine repeated her words. The red spots became deeper on her cheeks.

Mrs. North's mind again reverted to the camphire. She did not know but that she might even need burned feathers also. But she would try to keep her senses, so that she might hear everything this child thought proper to say.

Mr. Grove, in the extremity of the misfortune which had now come upon him, looked like any common man who had never caressed luxuriant whiskers.

Katharine stood up in slender straightness. She told herself that she was trusting in herself now. And she must be worthy of that trust.

"I mean," she said, "that I am never going to live with you, Mr. Grove. I don't know in the least what will become of me. But I've made up my mind not to live with you."

"Katharine," said her mother, "be careful what you say. Remember, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

"I guess God had plaguey little to do with this marriage!"

This exclamation came with explosive bravery from Mr. North. Katharine turned towards him with a gesture that made him suddenly put his arms out as if he would take her away, and thus put an end to this painful scene.

"Colburn!" said his wife.

It was a relief to Mrs. North to find it necessary to address her husband in this way. And her husband looked at her with a high, marital air which she knew very well did not mean anything, and was only a part of Mr. North's manner which was so calculated to deceive the general public. Mrs. North turned again to Katharine.

"What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," she repeated. "I hope, Kate, you ain't thinking of flying in the face of Providence."

And now the woman began to perceive, with a blank surprise that made the blood come thickly up towards her head, that what she said did not appear to have its usual effect on her daughter.

The girl looked at her as she spoke, but there was not that shrinking which betokened the morbid conscientious awakening which had always come to Katharine after the first rebellious impulse towards her mother.

Mr. Grove roused himself. The more his wife made him understand that their lots did not lie together, the stronger was his resolution that they should so lie.

"Perhaps it would be just as well," he said—"seeing there seems to be a little misunderstanding—for Kate and I to talk it out by ourselves."

"Yes," said the girl.

"Go right into the set'n room," said Mrs. North, in a hollow voice.

Katharine led the way, and Mr. Grove carefully closed the door behind them. As he did so he wished that there had been a lock on the door, and that he could turn the key. He felt that he was at this moment singularly unable to judge what this young person might do.

Katharine's father and mother, left alone at this crisis in their daughter's life, maintained for several moments their respective attitudes.

Mr. North ground his head yet harder into the paper on the wall behind him. Mrs. North clutched with her thick, roughened hands the arms of her chair. She wanted to say something very telling. She wanted to make Colburn know that this was all his fault. She could see so plainly that it was entirely his fault. But there was something pressing so hard in the back of her head that she could not think of any appropriate words. She had never known before that words were such extremely inexpressive things.

If she had some large, solid substance which she might throw at the man standing there, she thought the throwing would be of great benefit to her, even if it did him no good. Having no such missile, she could at first only gaze fixedly at him.

As Colburn North had no particular pressure in the back of his head, it was he who spoke first.

"I hope you've made a pretty mess this time, Roxy. I told you to let it alone."

Roxy gasped.

"Me!" she exclaimed—"Colburn, I wish you'd bring me the camphire."

She succumbed at last, so far as to make this request.

When the bottle was brought, she saturated a fold of her apron, and held it to her nose. The fumes revived her.

Her companion was conscious of a feeling of alarm. He knew very well that she was not a woman prone to an indiscriminate calling for camphor.

"Don't you feel well?" he asked.

"Colburn," she responded, "I wish you'd hold your tongue."

The man sat down. He leaned his elbows on his knees, and put his hands over his face.

The odor of camphor was strong on the air, and the odor sickened him.

From across the entry he could sometimes hear a faint murmur of voices. He wondered if Kitty did not need him. Poor little Kitty! She was only a child. At least she had been only a child a few weeks ago. And now she was trying to oppose Marcellus Grove. Of course she could not do it; or rather, she could not succeed in doing it.

Finding her head easier after ten minutes, Mrs. North took the saturated fold of gingham from her nostrils.

"Colburn!" she said.

Her husband started, and uncovered his face.

"Why don't you go into that room, and tell that child of yours what the Bible says about wives being subject to

their husbands? If she don't see her duty she ought to be made to see it."

Mr. North grinned in a derisive and somewhat rebellious manner.

"I don't know much about wives being subject to their husbands," he answered. "I guess I won't say anything about that."

He rose and walked out of doors. Reaching the fence, he bent upon it, and hung his head. He was constantly asking himself if Kitty needed him. What could he do? What could he do?

Within that room, the two who had gone to arrange "the little misunderstanding" had at first remained silent for some moments.

Katharine had sat down quickly. Mr. Grove began wandering about the room, touching different articles as he went, and carefully refraining from looking at the girl in the chair by the window. She was wondering why it was that she had been forsaken of God and man, and allowed to take part in that ceremony of the night previous. Why had she not then been capable of the unbending resolution which nerved her now? How weak she had been in trusting so much to prayer and to God! It was that trust, she thought, which had kept her from reaching this stratum of her character, where she had come upon a capacity for resolve.

She really had known but little more of herself than as if she had been some one else.

She was not formulating this in words, or even in ideas. She was only feeling it intensely and surprisedly, as youth feels things.

And she watched Mr. Grove as he went about the room. He was looking haggard and unhappy.

All at once she felt sorry for him. But of course he could not feel things as she felt them. He was too old. And then she supposed he had been in love a great many times. Could it be really possible that he fancied now, this very moment, that he was in love with her?

This question startled her. He had wanted to marry her for some reason. He was now much annoyed, of course. But was he actually suffering?

"Mr. Grove," she began, "I am very sorry I have been so wrong."

He turned eagerly towards her. He came close to her chair.

"I was sure you'd see how mistaken you'd been," he exclaimed. "Somebody must have been putting odd notions into your head. But we'll make it all right now. Why, Kate, you've no idea how much I think of you. I am real fond of you—or I shall be when you give me a chance. You sh'll have everything you want. I shall really like to spend money on you."

The man straightened himself. His hand went up to his beard. He spoke almost ardently. He was not a bad man. His affections had, naturally, been somewhat diffused. And he liked to say occasionally that he had always been a great admirer of what he called "the sex."

At this moment he was telling himself that Katharine was absolutely charming—even though she shrank away from him as he approached. He would like to know who had been putting these notions into her mind.

"No matter," he said magnanimously, "if you have been a little trying—since you see you've been wrong, we won't say any more about it. Not another word. And we'll start for New York this morning."

Katharine lifted her eyes to the man's face. She was very white.

"But I didn't mean I was wrong in that way," she said. "I meant I was wrong when I let them marry us. Now I am right. Only I ought to have been right before."

Her young voice sounded touchingly resolute, at the same time that it was pleading and undisciplined.

Mr. Grove would hear nothing but the pleading and young tones.

"You know we are married—and that's the end of it," he said. "And you sha'n't be sorry either."

A grotesque impulse came to him to add that he was sure none of his wives had been sorry. He was really an excellent husband, and he was positive, could they speak from their graves, that they would say so.

But he had sufficient sense to combat this impulse successfully.

He waited. Not yet did it occur to him that it could be a possibility that Katharine would stand by what she said.

"Do you remember that I told you plainly I didn't want to marry you?" asked the girl.

"Oh, yes, I remember that. But girls say a lot of things, you know. And you did marry me."

This last remark was so incontrovertible that it really seemed as if the subject might be closed now. Anything but a feminine brain would see instantly that it was closed.

"Don't you think we are wasting time?" he asked, with an indulgent smile. "And that express-train won't wait, you know. You'll be interested in New York. You've no idea what a place it is! And the Central Park, and a thousand things. I'll go and ask your mother to get breakfast for us."

Mr. Grove moved towards the door.

"I shall not go," said Katharine.

Mr. Grove thought it was astonishing how much irritating obstinacy could be contained in one woman's mind.

"I want you to understand me. We needn't keep talking. I sha'n't go."

The girl rose. She went behind her chair and took hold of the top of it, feeling that need of clutching something which often accompanies a mental strain.

"I've a great mind to make you go."

Mr. Grove was suddenly aware of a terrible access of savage and brutal anger. It filled his whole consciousness.

Should that slender thing stand there and look at him thus, and he not be able to break it?

He would break it, somehow. But the very frailty of the object was a hindrance to the wreaking of his rage.

The man stiffened physically before this onslaught of feeling.

A wild fear that perhaps he should have a "stroke" came to his mind.

He raised his hand furiously. Then he let it fall weakly.

"Do you know what you're saying?" he cried out.

"Yes."

"If you know, then you know enough to take it back, quick!"

Katharine looked about her.

"Oh, dear!" she said, with the simplicity and plaintiveness of a child.

Mr. Grove felt as if he were fighting against air. The girl's eyes now returned to his face.

"I didn't know but you would help me," she said, "when you understood."

"Help you to what?"

"To arrange so that I need not have to suffer much more, just now. I've suffered a great deal, Mr. Grove. Do you think you could help me—about mother, you know—and about it all?"

She looked earnestly up at him. As this hope of help from him came to her, her features lost their set look. They began to quiver slightly.

"It would make things so much easier," she added.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Grove.

There is generally some fibre of chivalry even in the most unpromising male character. Marcellus Grove was positively certain that he had never met with anything like the audacity of this request. And he was astounded at himself that something within him prompted him to assent.

He thought with exceeding swiftness for the next few moments, walking about the room again as he did so. Policy came to the aid of chivalry. Then he went up to the girl, and held out his hand.

"All right," he said brusquely. "I'm going. You needn't think I shall plague the life out of you. I'll say something

to your mother. And I'll give out that you were not well enough to go. You see, I've got to go."

In the poignancy of the revulsion of her feeling, Katharine extended both hands to him.

He took them eagerly. He hesitated a moment. Then he bent towards her. But she shrank.

"Oh, please don't!" she whispered.

Possibly the man might be pardoned for growling "The devil!" under his breath as he turned away. He tramped heavily out of the room and into the kitchen, where Mrs. North was now making slow preparations for breakfast. She turned.

"Well?" she said.

"Kate has decided not to go with me this morning," he explained. "I s'pose North can drive me over to Riply. I'll hitch up the colt right off."

Having spoken thus, Mr. Grove looked with scowling intentness at the woman before him.

"Now, see here, Mrs. North," he continued—"you just let my wife alone, will you? Her nerves are all unstrung. You've been hectoring her no end along back. Don't do it any more."

Having thus delivered himself, the man went out to harness the colt, leaving Mrs. North with another distinct pressure in the back of her head.

She had begun to pour boiling water from the tea-kettle into the coffee-pot, and she continued to do so until a stream of scalding water fell on her foot, which was clothed outwardly in a list shoe.

She stolidly set the coffee-pot and the kettle on the stove. She looked about, and addressed the vacant room.

"After what I've done, too. It was me that done it. I held her nose right down, 'n' she had to marry him. I done it for her good, too. Folks are the most ungrateful set in the world. He wants me to let his wife alone! He don't want me to hector his wife!"

She went to the closet, and again sopped a portion of her

apron with camphor. She dabbed her mouth and nose with this portion. The world might as well come to an end.

The door opened, and Katharine came in.

"Aren't you well, mother?" she asked, pausing just within the room.

"I'm as well's I can be," was the answer.

"But I smell camphor?"

"I should be surprised if you didn't, seeing my apron's wet with it."

"Mother, I'm so sorry—" began the girl.

"I guess I don't feel much like hearing you talk now," interrupted Mrs. North.

Katharine stood irresolute. Then she advanced to the stove and moved the coffee-pot, whose contents were bubbling over and frying loudly on the hot cover.

Her mother watched her above the camphor-wet apron at her mouth. At last she said,

"I guess, mebby, you'd better go 'n' lay down. You must be kinder tired. Though p'r'aps you"—the pronoun strongly emphasized—"p'r'aps you slept last night. I'm sure I hope you did, and I shouldn't wonder if you might want to think a little. I've heard of its doing folks good to think. I'd certainly lay down if I was you."

Katharine hesitated still. She thought of her mother, as she looked at her, as of some stranger with whom she was thoroughly out of sympathy.

An impulse to try to say something that should bring them nearer together was immediately subdued as being utterly useless. Without speaking again, she left the room. As she passed by the open outer door the sound of horse's feet and of wheels made her turn her head.

Mr. Grove was just driving out of the barn. He was gazing sharply at the house.

He saw the figure there. He caught off his hat. Then he hurriedly put it on again, and pulled in the colt.

"What sh'll I bring you from New York, Kate?" he asked.

"Oh, thank you! Nothing, nothing," she cried in answer.

But as she spoke she had an uncomfortable sense of being ungracious. Still she had spoken the simple truth.

Her father was sitting beside Deacon Grove. He would drive back the colt. She saw him turn and gaze at her as she still stood there.

She remained so long in the doorway that her mother, again dully revived by camphor, called out from the kitchen,

"Katharine, I guess you better lay down."

The girl went up the stairs to her own room. She shrank as she saw her wedding-bonnet and mantle lying on the bed.

And she then perceived that she still wore her travelling-dress.

With a curious sense of having to do with something just dead, but something for which she did not mourn in the least, she put away the hat and cape, and changed her gown for an old gingham frock which was closely associated with her every-day life before Deacon Grove came home with her from that prayer-meeting.

Having done this, she sat down by the open window, and told herself that she would begin to think and plan.

But she really did nothing of the kind. Her mind was immediately enveloped in a nebulous rush of thought which had no particular aim. It was like clouds drifting hither and thither over a blue sky.

She was, however, keenly and blissfully conscious of a sense of relief. This sense was so great that she did not have much care at the present moment what became of her. Nothing could become of her, of any consequence, since she was safely through with the last few hours.

If her mother objected to her staying at home, it was no matter.

As she sat there by the window the warm air blew upon her. She was almost happy.

Of course it was wrong of her in some way to be almost happy at such a juncture, but there was the fact.

She leaned her forehead on the sash, and her hair drifted about her face. She was rather surprised that the wind could do exactly as it had done last week, last year, before she had been a woman of such experience.

Her absently gazing eyes suddenly became aware that a figure had left the Damon house and was coming with purposeful energy along the path in the mowing. It was Joanna.

Presently Katharine heard her friend's voice below, and then her heavy, decided step on the stairs.

The door was flung open with an air of decision.

Joanna advanced into the middle of the room, and then paused.

"If this don't beat all!" she said, and immediately, "it does beat all."

Katharine made no response. She had risen, and stood with her back to the window.

"Your mar says the deacon's gone?"

"Yes, he has."

"Oh, my goodness! What you going to do with your wedding-bunnit 'n' cape?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought."

"I sh'd think you'd try to think. I must say I sh'd think you'd do as much as to try."

"I've been trying."

"What do you conclude?"

"Nothing. Perhaps I haven't much mind. I almost begin to believe I haven't."

Katharine laughed. Her eyes began to shine. Again she had a sense that she must be very strange to be almost happy.

Joanna contemplated her friend in silence during the space of a moment.

"Ain't you got anything to tell me?" she asked. "You must have some plans. Are you going over to Deacon Grove's when he comes back? Has he gone to New York?"

"Yes; he said he had to go."

"Are you going there when he comes back?"

"Oh, no."

Joanna waited again before she said,

"Well, then, if you ain't got any plans, p'r'aps you'll be some interested in mine?"

"I am interested," was the animated reply. "Tell me."

"You know," began Joanna eagerly, "that I told you about Emma Taft being a waiter down to one of the shore hotels last summer?"

"I remember."

"I thought I wouldn't tell a soul but my folks, 'cause it all might fall through, but I told Emma to get me a chance if she could. And she's done it. And I'm going down right away—that is, the day before the Fourth, you know. I sh'll earn considerable over my board, 'n' Emma says the girls have a good time. And I shall save every cent towards my things, you know."

Katharine advanced impulsively and seized her friend's hands.

"Can't you get me a place, Joanna?" she asked.

Joanna fell back a pace.

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, indeed, I mean it."

"Then I'll try."

VI.

"A GREAT PUBLIC SPEAKER"

The season at the "South Shore" is open very much indeed immediately after the "Fourth." It seems almost impossible that anything should open so decisively in such a short space of time. That is, anything which had been closed with such extreme tightness.

Of course the ocean had been there all through the spring, and the white stretch of Nantasket Beach, and the hills, and Point Allerton, and the many other lovely things. But in a "resort," ocean and hills are likely to be considered only as incidental accompaniments to bowling-alleys and shooting-galleries and ice-cream saloons; and innumerable places where you can get a "genuine shore dinner," with immense slabs of watermelon for dessert—and all for fifty cents.

Yes, certainly the season was open on this southern coast of Massachusetts Bay. The band in the veranda of Hotel Nantasket was tootleing and drumming every afternoon and evening. Steamboats were stopping at the landings; crowds of people were streaming up from those landings all the earlier part of the day, and streaming back again in the afternoon.

The people who were "residing" here were not often seen until nearly sunset. Then they walked out on piazzas, or they drove languidly forth in all kinds of summer carriages. And they looked down on those who were walking.

What these residents did during the long hours when they were not visible may never be definitely known to those who are not in their set.

Sometimes, from the scrupulousness with which they remained unseen, it had been rumored among the irreverent that these chosen ones were kept shut up in little dens, fed by keepers, and only let out when the sun was at just such a point above the horizon, and when, from some cause, they become harmless, and could be permitted to roam at large in the world they seemed to think they adorned.

"Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes, it's just as pretty as it can be. It's the prettiest evening we've had since we've been here. I do wish I could go out in a boat, or something."

The above question was put by Katharine, and the answer given by Joanna, as the two stood at the door of one of the cafés that are scattered along above high-water mark on Nantasket Beach.

It was getting so nearly dusk that the swarms of flies in the long room behind them only buzzed convulsively and individually, not continuously and unanimously, as when the sun was high in the heavens.

The odor of fried fish and chowder was also gradually growing fainter and fainter, flowing off in the southwest wind that breathed gently now among the pinked tissue-paper festoons about the ceiling and over the lamps.

There were three rows of tables ranged along the room—little oblong tables with shiny wooden tops. In the middle of every table stood a small caster and a diminutive tumbler of pink glass. This pink-glass tumbler was filled with toothpicks.

The two girls had been at the café for several days. They had learned what to do in that time, but they were not yet very expert in the doing it.

Particularly was Katharine sometimes seized with a sudden helplessness when the room would all at once become full and orders seem hopelessly complicated.

Now, however, there was only one man. He was sitting at a table that belonged to Emma Taft. He was slowly

eating plain boiled clams, which he dipped in melted butter; then tilted his head back and flung into his mouth, and apparently so far down his throat that the act of swallowing became superfluous. There are some men who always will eat clams in that way. It is a fascinating, but not wholly pleasing, employment, to watch them as they thus feed themselves.

Emma Taft, whose duty it was to attend to this person's wants, was watching now and counting involuntarily as he elevated his head.

She was wishing also that he would hurry up and go, for she wanted to join the two girls at the door. It was almost too late now for anybody to come in until in the evening, when the people who came to listen to the band would refresh themselves with ice-cream.

"Twenty-seven," half audibly whispered Emma Taft as the twenty-seventh clam was engulfed.

"Oh, I don't see how he does it," she thought fretfully and wearily. "But then he takes time enough, land knows. I wonder what the clams think, to be thrown in like that. I do hope he won't want pie or anything."

She glanced at the door again. Joanna and Katharine had stepped without, on to the broad platform. They stood with their arms thrown loosely about each other, and they were constantly looking back to see if, by any chance, their tables were occupied.

But no one came.

The man took his knife and knocked loudly on his glass of water. Then he looked domineeringly at Emma, who had immediately started towards him. His look intimated that she had not come quickly enough.

"A cup of coffee, strong, and a piece of Washington pie," he said.

Emma Taft reached over, and took his check.

"Now, don't be all night about it," he remarked, with a half-laugh. "You girls have a rousin' good time here, I guess—don't you?"

She smiled constrainedly, and answered,

"Yes, sir, when we ain't too busy."

She removed the pile of clam-shells and the crumbs of bread and the dish of melted butter from the table.

The man leaned back, and watched her, freely using a toothpick as he did so. As Emma hurried, thus laden, by her two acquaintances, she said,

"You two girls are lucky. I guess that old man's going to eat all night."

"Not so lucky as you think. There comes somebody now," responded Joanna quickly. "I wonder whose table they'll go to? Just look at um, Kitty. They are the real high-uffum-buffums, you bet. What in the world are they coming here for?"

The two girls stepped within, so as not only to be ready, but to seem so. Emma Taft hastened on into that mysterious region where there is always frying and boiling, and where dishes are always clattering.

The people who had entered were a man and a woman. The woman was a little past middle age, but she dressed and carried herself with a certain air that made people think very little of that fact. She was not exactly "dashy," but she was quite a good deal in evidence wherever she appeared. Particularly was this the case in a place like this she had just entered.

The waiter-girls, standing there watching her, took in with eagerness every detail of the quiet and appropriate elegance of her costume.

She stood an instant near the door, glancing down the long room where the sunlight was growing red.

Her companion went a few yards ahead. He was a young man, with a closely shaven, fair face and long eyes surmounted by thick brows, so dark as to give a somewhat startling effect at first to his countenance. His hair was cropped so closely that it now had the effect of being much lighter than his brows.

He held his hat in his hand, and he carried also his com-

panion's fan and a light shawl. He was dressed scrupulously in the prevailing style, but without the effect of having paid any special attention to his attire.

He half turned towards the spot where the lady lingered.

"Odd place, isn't it?" he said in an extremely low tone; "but I like to come to such places. I like to see all kinds. Only this isn't as interesting as the real low-down ones—the dens, you know. These half-way measures are never interesting, you know."

The lady did not answer.

The next moment a man from the desk came obsequiously forward, as if to show the new-comers to some seats.

"Don't trouble yourself," said the lady in a clear, decisive tone—"we will select our seats."

The man walked back to his place.

The lady moved leisurely down the room and took a chair near the open door.

"It's one of your tables, Kitty," eagerly whispered Joanna.

Katharine advanced slowly within a few yards and waited.

The man and the woman had not yet glanced at her.

Katharine brought a dingy bill of fare and placed it before them. As she did so the lady raised her eyes and, as it happened, looked full into those of the girl. It was merely an accident, but the young gaze unconsciously held the older one for much more than the space during which strangers should survey each other.

Then Katharine turned away and remained quietly waiting. She was thinking also—thinking confusedly, with an access of heat in her face that seemed somehow to dim her vision.

The lady took up the bill of fare and held it before her. She asked the young man if they should order something.

"Certainly; since we have come in," he responded.

She pushed the slip of paper towards him and said,

"Select something, then. Only not much. Really, if we wanted to get an impression we ought to come when there's

a crowd here. Now there is only the tissue paper, apparently. Will you give me my fan, Owen?"

The young man complied with her request. As he did so he remarked,

"It does not seem warm here to me."

She unfurled the fan.

"No, not warm. But there's a good deal of fried fish still in the air. Order the most harmless thing you can select. Ice-cream, say."

The man gave the order, and Katharine walked away.

"Did you notice that girl?" The lady put this question after a short pause.

Her companion was still giving his attention to the bill of fare.

"What girl?" he asked.

"There has been but one."

"Pardon me, I have had glimpses of three."

The lady did not reply. She remained silent, absently waving her fan. Suddenly she exclaimed,

"It was very curious."

"What is curious?"

"Why, that when I happened to meet that girl's eyes just now it was as if I were looking into my own eyes as they were twenty years ago."

The young man smiled rallyingly, but still respectfully. And he made no other reply.

"Extraordinary," she said again.

Katharine now returned, bearing her little tray, with two very thick white dishes with ice-cream upon them. Stuck in each frozen mass was a spoon so unblushingly tin that the lady, when she took one in her hand, gave a dismayed stare at her escort. She did not this time look at Katharine at all.

And Katharine immediately retreated to where Joanna stood.

"I don't know why they came in here," she said indignantly.

Joanna laughed.

"I sh'd think you'd know," she responded. "They come to see what it's like here. And I don't much blame um if they can't quite put them spoons in their mouths. I think they might at least furnish plated ones. They ain't goin' to eat that ice-cream. I wonder if they'll call for anything more. Did you notice the young man?"

"No; yes; I did think he had queer eyebrows. But I was looking at the woman. I've never seen any one in the least like her, have you?"

"I see um out in carriages or on horseback sometimes," answered Joanna.

But she was not thinking of the woman. She was mentally comparing that man with her travelling salesman, much to the advantage of the latter.

"No," she suddenly added," they ain't goin' to eat it. Hurry up, Kitty, she's motioning to you."

After stirring the cold concoction a few moments the lady had announced that she would have some tea. And she beckoned to Katharine.

"What, isn't the cream enough, Mrs. Llandaff?"

"No. Will you bring me a cup of tea?" to Katharine, who silently took the check and waited for the space of a second for the young man to give another order.

He shook his head and said pleasantly,

"Nothing more for me."

When she had gone he remarked,

"Not one person in ten would look at that girl a second time."

Mrs. Llandaff gave him a glance of indignation.

"But the tenth one would be the person of taste and perception. And he would do a great deal that he might see her again."

The young man threw his head back and laughed noiselessly.

"I did not say but that I was the tenth," he said.

"Oh, I hope not," quickly.

"It is hard to please you," he remarked.

This time when Katharine came he gave her a veiled but intent look of which she was not in the least aware.

"I'm sorry the cream is not good," she ventured to say in a low voice to Mrs. Llandaff, who smiled at her as she answered,

"It's of no consequence. I don't think I cared for cream, after all. Wait a minute, please. I suppose you only come here for the summer?"

"Yes. This is the first time I've tried being a waitress."

"Do you like it?"

"I don't know yet—I get confused when there's a crowd."

"You don't live near here?"

"No. I live at Feeding Hills—that is, I used to live there."

As Katharine spoke she suddenly felt that she hardly knew where her home was now, and the feeling gave her a sensation like bereavement, and this emotion immediately showed itself in her face.

Mrs. Llandaff said nothing more. Again Katharine walked away.

"These people certainly must own a tin mine," Mrs. Llandaff observed as she looked down into the tea-cup, where another tin spoon awaited her.

"Next time try something that you can eat with your fingers," advised the young man—"that is, if you are resolved to refresh yourself here."

"Don't be silly, Owen."

The person thus addressed leaned back in his chair and took up the fan.

"You are wise enough for us both, you know," he said.

"One of us must be wise. I wish you'd pay for this stuff. Let us walk on the beach a few moments. How incessantly that band goes on! Why do people always want a brass band?"

"Because people like it. There are moments even now when I like it."

"You? Well, one never knows what to expect of you, any way. Don't think you must walk on the beach with me, Owen, if you want to go somewhere else?" as the two rose from the table.

"But I don't want to go anywhere else. One place is very much like another down here, and you can hear the band almost across the ocean, I should say."

When the two were strolling over the hard sand, away from the string of hotels, and as far down towards the water as they could safely go, Mrs. Llandaff suddenly asked,

"Did you hear where she said she came from?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," turning in smiling surprise.

"That girl, you know."

"Oh, the tin-spoon girl? No, I didn't catch where she said she did come from."

"She said Feeding Hills."

"Yes?—well, where is Feeding Hills?"

"It is the place where I was born."

He turned now and looked at the speaker with some interest.

"Indeed!" he said. And then he added, "I suppose that fact can hardly account for your feeling about her. No, of course it can't, for you had the feeling first. Still, I suppose a good many people have been born at Feeding Hills."

"No, not many. It's a small place. I've a mind to go there to-morrow. I suppose it's about sixty miles from here."

"But you speak to-morrow."

"Yes, so I do. The next day, then. I wish I had asked the child her name."

"It is not too late. Shall I run up and present Mrs. Owen Llandaff's compliments, and will you please tell your name? Mrs. Llandaff now recalls that she was born at Feeding Hills."

But Mrs. Llandaff did not appear to listen, and made no response.

It was always a puzzle at first to people who saw these two together as to what relation they held to each other.

There was a kind of devotion, though it was a trifle careless, always evident in the man's attitude and manner towards her. And there was a certain tenderness in her voice and face, even when she reproved him.

As he was Owen Llandaff and she was Mrs. Owen Llandaff, there had upon occasion been some confusion. She was certainly old enough to be his mother. But men had been known to marry women who were old enough to be their mothers.

This young man had threatened to have engraved below his name upon his cards the explanatory legend, "Step-son to the great speaker, Mrs. Llandaff."

For it was in fact the father who had married this woman when the boy was in his teens.

And from the moment the boy had known her he had given her an admiring homage and love. The admiration in these later days was not so comprehensive as it had been, but it was still genuine. And as for the love, she was used to being loved, in one way or another, in greater or less degree, by a great many men.

It amused these two that people could rarely adjust them at first, and that the most natural conclusion was rarely, if ever, drawn—that is, that they were mother and son. Sons did not, as a rule, have precisely that air to their mothers, and they were not so constantly in their society.

Sometimes Mrs. Llandaff would condescend to introduce him as "my step-son," and the relief to curiosity was then so evident that it caused much secret enjoyment to the two. Generally, however, the relationship was left to be discovered or not.

When she spoke in public, and for some time she had been in great demand, young Llandaff was always visible in the audience somewhere near the platform. Occasionally

he would join in the enthusiastic applause. And there would be a whimsical smile lurking in his eyes as he did so.

But, in truth, accustomed as he was to these scenes, he caught himself often falling under the spell of the woman's eloquence.

Well as he fancied he knew her, he could not yet affirm that he was positive whether her interest in any particular cause was a genuine caring for the cause, or a caring for it as a something into which she could throw herself with an enthusiasm which certainly had so much of the genuine in it that it seemed all genuine and moved people in a surprising degree.

But her devotees, her admirers, were troubled with no such questions as sometimes came to young Llandaff's mind; and even in his mind they were fleeting and comparatively of little importance.

He used to give her long, inquiring looks. He was in the habit of telling himself that really Mrs. Llandaff, as he always called her, was an unaccountably interesting woman. Then he would wonder why she came to marry his father. For he was not so blinded as to think for a moment that his father was interesting in the least.

The elder Llandaff was a big man with small, white mutton-chop whiskers on a beef-red face. He remained mostly on the estate he had purchased in Wales, where he domineered in a generous, autocratic way over his tenants. He had chosen Wales as the place for his estate because of his name. He said he didn't see why people who had been born and lived in the United States for several generations should have remained in the United States as long as there was Wales.

But his second wife did not agree with him in this conviction. At the same time that he decided to live in Wales she decided not to live there. It was about this period, also, that she appeared to find her vocation.

It amused young Owen to go with her at first, and his

presence was an eminently respectable link with that husband who had turned Welshman.

After a few years of separation, Owen was in the habit of saying that as a respectable link his function was about played out.

At these words his step-mother glanced at him and smiled slightly.

"My dear child," she said, "I'm not keeping you. Go back to your father."

On one of these occasions the young man, hearing her say this, stopped in his walk about the room and leaned on the back of her chair.

"But my father bores me, and you don't. Don't send me to my father, please."

"I'm not sending you. I like to have you with me."

"Really?"

She laughed.

"No, not really—unreally."

He still continued,

"If I were asked to describe in a few words the great public speaker, I should say that her most marked characteristic is that she never bores one—even when she is on the platform."

"Oh, thanks."

"Remarkable truth, isn't it?" he resumed. "No, I'm not going to Wales. I'm going to continue to arrange your engagements, to tell you when they come off, and sit and listen to you when they are coming off. Oh, it's great fun, I tell you. And I always guess which times you're most in earnest."

"I'm always in earnest."

Owen laughed.

"Oh, I know that. That's why you never bore any one. You are in earnest; still, not so much so but that you know when to stop. You are really perfect, Mrs. Llandaff."

"That will do, Owen."

The young man leaned back in the chair in which he had

now seated himself. He continued to gaze at his step-mother.

"'Nor custom stale her infinite variety,'" he suddenly remarked.

Mrs. Llandaff turned sternly towards him.

"Owen, leave the room," she said.

He drew a set of ivory tablets from his pocket.

"Let us see about our engagements," he remarked calmly.

She resumed the fan she had been slowly wielding.

It was the day after that time when they had visited the café where they had feasted upon ice-cream and tea. It was also very late in the afternoon.

In the morning Mrs. Llandaff had addressed a meeting of the Ladies' United Association, which had been held in the largest hotel near. Her name had called a crowd together. It had been an enthusiastic gathering. Indeed, it was always an enthusiastic gathering when Mrs. Llandaff spoke. A great deal of money had been subscribed.

Even the Jack-roses which some adoring young girl gave into her hand seemed to shed an odor of success as Mrs. Llandaff reached down to take them.

And she smiled into the girl's face, while her low-spoken "Thank you" might have been a declaration of love, and was long remembered as such a declaration might have been remembered.

Now, as she sat fanning herself, the roses were in a jar near her. She bent over to press her face gently among them.

As she lifted her head she told her step-son that he must find a place for Feeding Hills.

"There is no need of my speaking again for a week. I'm tired. I came here to rest."

"But when your aid is needed to augment the funds of the Ladies' United Association—" began Llandaff.

"I will go to-morrow," said Mrs. Llandaff abruptly.

"Very well. I'll go over to Lynn in Marston's yacht. You are sure you won't change your mind?"

She did not change her mind. Katharine and Joanna were coming up from the boat wharf at ten the next morning, when they met Mrs. Llandaff walking alone down the planking. She seemed very absorbed and absent-minded, and she did not notice the two girls. But they noticed her.

"There's that woman you waited on the other day," hurriedly whispered Joanna.

But Katharine was looking at her. She only dimly heard her friend go on.

"I found out who she was. I was bound I would. She's stopping up to the Atlantic. And she's a great public speaker."

The girl pronounced the last words with some triumphant awe.

"And I found out who the fellow is. I was bound I'd know that, too. They've got kind of odd names. I most forget—oh, Llandaff."

Katharine turned towards Joanna.

"That's queer," she said, as if the matter were only a coincidence; "my Aunt Kate married a man named Llandaff. I think that's the name."

"Did she? What do you know about your Aunt Kate, anyway?"

"Nothing in particular. I never saw her. Mother always mentions her as if she had been a very odd woman. I don't know why, I'm sure. Once I asked father."

Here the girl hesitated.

"Well," said Joanna, without much interest, "what did your father say?"

"Not much. Only that I needn't bother, that my Aunt Kate was all right. But she hasn't had anything to do with us since I can remember."

The girls were constantly meeting people. They now met a half-dozen young men, swinging eagerly along in yachting suits. One of them was Llandaff.

As he glanced at the two he said to himself,

"Oh, there's Mrs. Llandaff's tin-spoon girl."

VII.

ROXY'S SISTER

It was somewhat more than twenty years since Mrs. Llandaff had been at Feeding Hills. She had been young that day when she had turned her back on the place in a fury of anger and resentment. Now, as she returned, she was no longer young, but she asked herself with continually increasing surprise why she could not believe she was not young.

When she looked in the glass, the matter of wrinkles and increasing grayness of hair confronted her with unimpeachable testimony. Then she shrugged her shoulders in a French fashion she had, and smiled in a sad fashion that was not at all French. Once turned from the mirror, however, she had a most satisfactory way of forgetting all about the wrinkles and the gray hair.

"I will leave it to others to remember them," she said airily to herself. "If I forget them, it is the same to me as if they did not exist."

During the time that had passed since she had seen Feeding Hills, she had thought little of the people there. The passion of wrath which had once filled her heart whenever she recalled her father had utterly subsided. Her father had been a hard man, an unyielding man; and he had never understood her. He had wanted her to marry a man whom she thought she hated—and she had run away. She had heard only indirectly from her home since that time. She had never sent a word to them there—why should she? she had asked herself. Her mother was dead before she could remember. Her sister Roxy was so much like her

father that there certainly was no call to keep up any communication with her. She had prospered so that she maintained herself respectably. Then she had prospered greatly.

Finally the hamlet that was her birthplace seemed almost to pass out of her memory, out of her thoughts.

As she leaned back in the car that was taking her there, Mrs. Llandaff suddenly asked herself seriously what she meant by this sudden action.

"It was that girl in the horrible café at the shore," she said in explanation. "And what am I to do when I get to the place, I should like to know. This is one of the results of yielding to impulse."

The outline of the hills began to be familiar, and to her great surprise the familiarity gave an unaccustomed beat to her pulses and a strange feeling to her throat.

"And yet I hated the place," she was thinking.

When she had left there was no railroad. Now the station was near an immense hotel, built for the accommodation of summer boarders. It had been discovered that the locality was picturesque.

Mrs. Llandaff walked up the broad planking to the hotel entrance. Wherever she appeared, even if she came in her present unpretentious manner, people always sprang to attend upon her.

They did so now with even more than the usual obsequiousness of the summer-hotel official.

She said she would have a lunch immediately; then she wanted a horse and carriage for several hours. No, she did not require a driver. She was used to driving.

She put her name down on the register, and every one who saw her come went and looked at the words, which they found in a tall, slanting illegibility which very few could decipher.

In less than half an hour from her arrival, Mrs. Llandaff was sitting alone in a buggy, and driving off along a road which had not been laid out, or thought of, when she was last here.

It was four miles to the old Hillard place, and she did not find the place at all. A new house was on the ancient foundation. In the yard a young woman was digging among some rose-bushes. She rose and came eagerly forward as she saw that woman in the carriage. She leaned on the wheel and was glad to answer the questions put to her.

"The Hillards? Why, old Cap'n Hillard had been dead almost before she could remember. He had left one daughter; she did believe there had been two. She had heard her mother say something about one who had gone away when she was young. But she didn't remember very well. It was such an awful while ago."

"And things so much more interesting have kept happening since," remarked Mrs. Llandaff, smiling and looking at a baby who had crept to the screen-door of the entry, and who now flung himself forcibly upon it.

The young woman laughed. She understood, and she liked the stranger who spoke and looked like that.

"I suppose Roxy Hillard married somebody," went on Mrs. Llandaff. "Does she live round here anywhere?"

"Oh, yes; she lives 'bout half a mile away. Take the first left-hand turn. You can't miss it. Two-story house with yeller trimmin's 'n' green blinds."

Mrs. Llandaff drove on. Her face was rather grave, and yet there was a smile in her eyes.

"Of course Roxy would be thrifty. I wonder if her husband submits gracefully, or whether he takes his bondage rather hard. I shouldn't like to be Roxy's husband; I'm sure of that. There's the house, and can that be Roxy herself?"

Walking across the yard from the orchard was a large woman, with a sun-bonnet on her head. She had her apron full of rhubarb-stalks.

When she saw the carriage she paused. She pulled her bonnet forward, so that the sun should not shine in her eyes.

The yard was spacious, and the horse was driven into it and up to the woman standing there.

Mrs. Llandaff was saying to herself,

"Can that be my sister? Have I changed as much as that? Yes, certainly, that's her very way of shutting her mouth. Only her mouth and cheeks have grown heavy and flabby."

For her part, Mrs. North was thinking that here was some one who wanted to inquire the way, or who wished to see Colburn about taxes or something. She nodded and then stood waiting.

But as she stood she began to be conscious of a vague sensation which she could not in the least understand.

The woman in the carriage looked intently at her, studying her face and thinking,

"She is just as she was when we were girls—only more so."

Mrs. North moved uneasily.

"P'r'aps you're somebody I ought to reco'nize," she said at last.

Mrs. Llandaff leaned forward from the shelter of the carriage-top. The searching sunlight now fell full upon her.

Mrs. North gathered her apron of rhubarb more tightly to her.

"It's Katharine," she said.

Mrs. Llandaff put out her hand. Her sister took it loosely for an instant and then dropped it. She did not like to be surprised in this way, and she remembered very well that she had never understood her sister. And what she did not understand she did not approve. Still, in her way, she was moved.

"Hadn't you better get out 'n' come in?" she asked. "I'll just lay this rhubarb down somewhere 'n' help you hitch your horse. I s'pose it's a hotel horse?"

Mrs. Llandaff stepped from the buggy.

"Yes," she said, "it's a hotel horse. Don't put down your rhubarb. I know very well how to hitch him, even to tying a horse-knot."

Mrs. North opened her lips to say it was just like Katharine to know how to tie a horse-knot. But she closed her lips without having said anything. She stood and watched her sister. She noted sluggishly the attractiveness of her attire. She felt that, though this woman was almost as old as she herself was, yet that it made but little difference. Well, of course it would make a difference some time. She ought to be glad to see her sister. Was she glad? There was a very slight stirring of something in her soul. Was it the mysterious power of kinship?

But really and truly Mrs. North knew she did not want her sister to stay. It would be a great trial to her if Katharine should make her a visit. And must she ask her to do so?

She was revolving this question in her mind as her guest fastened the horse.

Mrs. Llandaff turned, and her face showed that she was not entirely calm. Her early years were coming back to her too powerfully. And what was the strength of kinship to her?

"Take in your rhubarb, Roxy," she said, "I'll stroll about the yard for a minute. You know I haven't seen this country for years."

"Isn't it rather odd that you thought you wanted to come out here?" asked Roxy, pausing before she turned towards the house.

"Yes, I suppose so," was the answer.

She did not think it worth while to tell her sister that a girl she had seen at the shore had made her think of Feeding Hills. Roxy would not understand that.

"I guess I'll go in and be cutting this up," said Mrs. North, looking down at the contents of her apron. "And you come soon's you get ready."

"Yes, in a few minutes."

Mrs. Llandaff walked to the back of the yard and leaned on the fence which separated the yard from the mowing. She looked about her. She did not remember this house

at all; but that building at the right of the mowing—that was the old Damon place, surely.

Trees had grown where she remembered only saplings; trees had been cut down; still, feature after feature became familiar to her.

She saw two men appear in the Damon yard. They talked together. Then one walked along a path in the grass, and presently appeared close to her side.

He had the snath of a scythe over his shoulder.

It was Colburn North. He quickly put down the snath. His first thought was always of his daughter.

Now he stepped still nearer.

These two had not met since that time when he was a teacher and she a grown-up pupil over in the Brantford Academy. He had not known Roxy then.

For one instant the man and woman looked at each other as two souls might look, entirely unaware of the presence of any fleshly encumbrance.

Then Mrs. Llandaff extended her hand. She did not smile, however.

"It's Colburn," she said.

"Katharine," he responded. The two shook hands.

He took off his hat and held it as he remarked,

"This is a great surprise. But I should have known you anywhere."

"And I should have known you. Though I was not expecting to see you here."

Mr. North smiled rather constrainedly.

"Not expect to see me in my own home?" he said.

"But I didn't know this was your home. I came to see Roxy."

The man made a visible effort.

"I married Roxy."

He looked off down the meadow.

"Did you? I didn't know."

A silence. Then she went on.

"I did not care to hear anything from home. I was

afraid I should hear. And then after some years I found that what interest I had was almost gone."

"I can understand that."

"'Time rules us all,' you know the sentimental poet says. And it's a very fortunate thing that it does. You look prosperous here. I'm sure Roxy makes the best kind of a housekeeper. She never nags at you, and she sees that you are comfortable?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. North. "She is an excellent wife."

"Yes. And you are to have rhubarb sauce, or pie, for dinner. You like rhubarb?"

Mr. North smiled.

"Very much—and you will have dinner with us? I'll put up your horse. Of course you've seen Roxy?"

"Certainly. And here she is now."

The two were walking towards the house. Roxy appeared at the back door. She had decided to ask her sister cordially to stop to dinner. She didn't see how she could go any further than that.

It was of no use trying to make believe to herself that she could get along very well with Katharine.

Of course they wouldn't quarrel; she herself never quarrelled with any one. But she remembered Katharine's outbursts when they were young. The two sisters couldn't get along together, that was all. Of course it was really Katharine's fault.

Mrs. Llandaff felt as if she were in a dream for the next few hours.

She sat at the table and talked. She supposed she ate, though she could not tell afterwards.

She asked questions about everybody she could think of whom she had once known, and Roxy answered, glad to give all the details she could.

Mr. North said very little. He was aware once that his wife's slow eyes had dwelt for a long moment on his face. The knowledge of this made him strongly indignant.

He scarcely looked at his guest. But he showed that he listened to her. Of course Mrs. Llandaff talked well. She would have said that it was her business to talk, and that she ought to do it well.

But both her hearers remembered the old times, when some moment of enthusiasm would unloose the girl's tongue, and she would then become unconsciously eloquent, eyes and cheeks burning.

At such times Roxy had wished she wouldn't; it wasn't like the other folks in Feeding Hills to be like that.

When her sister had experienced religion, or thought that she had, Roxy recalled with what strange fervor and power Katharine had "spoken in meet'n." The mother had always been afraid her daughter might do the same thing, and she had been grateful that she had not done so.

Roxy made a great effort to talk on. She was afraid of every silence, lest Mrs. Llandaff might mention a subject she dreaded. But it was sure to come.

"You have no children, Roxy? Or are they married and gone? Such things make us feel so old."

"We have one daughter," stiffly answered Mrs. North.

"Is she at home?"

"No."

Now there came a long pause. At length Mrs. North said, with great formality, and with an air of closing the subject,

"We 'ain't been very lucky with our girl, Katharine. She ain't turned out just as we could have hoped. But we are waiting 'n' praying for things to mend."

Mr. North laid down his knife and fork. His face became white. He gazed across the table at the woman sitting there—at the woman who was not his wife.

This was one of the fleeting impulses of his life to which he yielded.

"Our girl is the best girl in the world," he said, with sharp emphasis. "But we made a great mistake about her. A terrible mistake."

The presence of Mrs. Llandaff seemed to stimulate and strengthen him for the moment. He did not appear to know that his wife was there. Certainly he did not care. He was, however, keenly alive to the fact that some one was at the table who had known him before he had become Roxy Hillard's husband.

"Yes, the best girl," he repeated. "And I named her Katharine—"

"It was grandmother's name, you know," calmly interrupted Mrs. North.

"I named her Katharine. And it's a curious thing, Mrs. Llandaff, that she has eyes precisely like yours."

"What?" said Mrs. Llandaff, rather sharply.

"You never know who children are going to take after," remarked Mrs. North.

The impulse had spent itself upon Colburn North. He suddenly became again only Roxy Hillard's husband.

He took up his knife and fork. Mrs. Llandaff did not then repeat her questioning ejaculation.

An hour after dinner she asked Colburn if he would bring round her horse.

Mrs. North, upon this, said her sister needn't be in any hurry. Didn't she think she'd better stop to supper?

No, Mrs. Llandaff didn't think so.

She waited until she was seated in the buggy and had the reins in her hand before she looked directly at Mrs. North and asked,

"Roxy, where is your daughter?"

"She's workin' to the shore this summer," was the answer.

"What shore? There's quite an extent of coast to the United States."

"Down to Nantasket."

"Well, good-by. If I come again I must not wait twenty years."

She gave her hand to her sister, then to her brother-in-law.

As she drove away the two stood and looked after her.

"She's just the same," said Mrs. North at last.

Mr. North only made an inarticulate sound.

"Exactly the same," reiterated the woman. "But I s'pose we don't any of us change much—only we grow older. She's grown older. And I don't see why it don't make more difference with her than it seems to. Didn't you think them biscuit turned out extry good, Colburn? I was almost afraid they wouldn't, 'cause I felt so particular about 'em."

"Yes, they were first-rate." As Mr. North said this he turned and walked across the road to the barn.

That night, as the two sat together in the twilight, after supper, Mrs. North, rocking heavily back and forth, said abruptly,

"I do hope Katharine won't go down to that shore where Kate is."

"Why?".

"Because," with great literalness, "she might see Kate. She might get acquainted with her."

Mr. North crossed his legs and then suddenly uncrossed them.

"She's your own sister, you know," he said at last.

"Of course. But," with stolid repetition, "I hope she won't go where Kate is."

This was a futile wish upon Mrs. North's part, for Mrs. Llandaff was driving along the hot, dusty road towards the hotel, with one intention extremely defined in her thoughts.

She meant to see that restaurant girl before she slept that night—"that tin-spoon girl," as Owen called her.

She could not help smiling that Roxy should have had a daughter so unlike her. But when she thought what the daughter's life with such a mother must be she ceased smiling.

She caught the train back to Boston. At twilight she was sitting on the deck of one of those harbor steamers which ply so incessantly between the town and the coast "resorts." She withdrew from that portion of the boat

where were many people she knew. She told herself that she felt like being alone. She wanted to think.

It is rather a striking fact that when people say they want to think, and remove themselves somewhat from their fellow-men for that purpose, they generally do not think at all—that is, with any consecutive or executive power.

This was the case with Mrs. Llandaff now. She turned her back on the crowd and fixed her eyes upon the moving water and the gliding shores of coast and islands. The glow of sunset had not entirely faded, but the faint, blue dusk of the evening had already come.

The harbor of Boston and the winding "inside track" taken by some of these steamers reveal beauties so exquisite that one might imagine himself in some lovely region more celebrated for mere beauty than is this Massachusetts coast.

Mrs. Llandaff would have said that she was always too susceptible to beauty of any kind. But she would have said it mockingly, and would have added that age and experience had hardened her.

Now her eyes took in the distant perspective of fast-deepening violet shadows, and her thoughts hovered continually over the first years of her girlhood. Again she said to herself, as she had said a thousand times before,

"Perhaps if mother had lived it would have been different."

At this point her mind came, almost with a material shock, upon the fact that one mother, Roxy, had lived. She was at this moment squarely and solidly alive out there in the farm-house at Feeding Hills.

Mrs. Llandaff suddenly sat upright.

"That child shall not have her heart shut in and misunderstood and stifled. No, she shall have some other fate than that. There is no danger but that she will suffer enough—but suffering is not the worst thing in the world. Only let the human being live. With full life suffering must come. But let us have the life."

With these words in her mind, Mrs. Llandaff rose to walk forward as the boat neared the wharf.

Everybody pressed towards the landing.

There were the carriages ranged carefully. The "residents" were out in force. Almost every carriage held carefully dressed ladies who had driven down to meet somebody coming from Boston. The harnesses glittered in the lights; the horses tossed up their heads and clanked the chains from their bits. The "barges" too, were ranged in their places. They would presently be filled by humble folk, who would be dropped out here and there at cottages or tents, or at some road that led up among the rocky nooks of Cohasset.

"You said you were not looking for Mrs. Llandaff to-night?"

The speaker was a girl who sat in one of the carriages drawn up in line. She was in an open phaeton, alone. She held the lines to a pair of ponies. She spoke to a young man on horseback who had wedged himself in between the phaeton and a high dog-cart.

"No," replied Owen Llandaff, "I was sure she wouldn't come until to-morrow; though she didn't say so."

"There she is; and if my friend hasn't come, ask her to let me take her to the Atlantic—will you, Mr. Llandaff? Don't let her go in one of those public carriages. You can get your horse close up there, and I must stay here."

Mrs. Llandaff now saw the two and acknowledged their salutations rather absently.

"She looks tired," said the girl; then she added in an undertone, "and sorry, some way." Turning more animatedly to the attendant horseman, she continued,

"Make her tell us all about Feeding Hills this evening, Mr. Llandaff. Any place that could get up a name like that must be interesting. But she would make it interesting, anyway. Do hurry, or you'll miss her. They've thrown out the plank."

"But she won't come with the crowd, you know."

The young man disappeared. Presently the girl saw him, dismounted, near the gangway.

She looked at him intently for an instant, and there was a keen scrutiny in her gaze.

She was very pretty, very conventional. She could not, at first glance, have been described so much as an individual as one of a class—the class of young women whose parents are wealthy, who have been educated, and who find it difficult to occupy their minds, either because of a vacuity in that portion of their make-up, or because that the world does not furnish the proper occupying material.

Even the ordinary young man is not always material for a young girl who is pretty enough and well placed enough to have learned early the exact extent of the entertaining power inherent in the ordinary youthful male of the human species.

At this moment, and for many odd moments previous since their acquaintance began, Miss Ella Wyckham had been endeavoring to decide whether Owen Llandaff should be put in exactly the same category as the rest of the yachting, tennis-playing, dancing men she knew.

And on this occasion, as on the other occasions when this subject had been presented to her, her decision was reached in these words,

"Well, his eyebrows are not ordinary, anyway."

Which remark was strictly truthful.

When Mrs. Llandaff approached her step-son, he said immediately,

"Miss Wyckham wants to take you up in her phaeton."

"Thank her for me, but I'm not going right up. And run along back to her, Owen. I don't want you."

"Sha'n't I call for you anywhere? Or send a carriage?"

"Oh, no, thanks. I'll come by myself when I get ready."

"You are very mysterious."

"I like to be mysterious sometimes. Go back to Miss Wyckham."

Mrs. Llandaff went slowly, but with an evident purpose, up the walk behind the people.

She was thinking that it was rather a sensation for her to find a niece as a waiter-girl in a café at the South Shore.

But, of course, the child had to get away somewhere.

There were a good many men and women eating and talking and chattering in the long room when Mrs. Llandaff reached the door. The tissue-paper was gently rustling; the place was very light.

Joanna, as she hurried down an aisle between the tables, saw the "public speaker," as she mentally called the woman, and exclaimed to herself,

"There she is again, I declare! What has she come again for?"

Mrs. Llandaff standing there, now perceived that it was a very poor time in which to hope to have a word with her niece.

But she meant to have one word, all the same.

There was the girl coming now, bearing clam-chowder and fried fish, the odor and the steam from the dishes going up about her burning cheeks.

VIII.

"AUNT KATE"

KATHARINE did not see Mrs. Llandaff until she had served out her chowder and her fish. Then as she drew back to look hurriedly at the rest of her special province to see if other orders were waiting, she was aware that a lady sat down at the nearest table, and that she beckoned to her.

She was also aware, with a sudden quickening interest, that it was the same lady who had asked her a few questions.

She walked up to Mrs. Llandaff and stood with one hand on the table, her empty waiter in the other, looking down at her. And the woman for the first instant could not speak. She was possessed by that ridiculous notion that this was her former self, projected on the canvas of the present, and gazing at her as if there had been no years between her youth and now.

Katharine's eyes were on her, clear, unconscious, and with something pathetic in them. It is terrible to see pathos in eyes so young. It has no right to be there.

Mrs. Llandaff moved uneasily.

Some one at the next table tapped a tumbler imperatively. Katharine turned, took an order, and hurried away to fill it.

The elder woman sat there. She was saying to herself,

"It is absurd that she should be Roxy's child. She should have been mine. How I could have understood her! She should have shared her very soul with me. Roxy's child! What was God thinking of to give the child to her?"

Katharine came back again with her tray laden. She glanced with a slight, deprecating smile at Mrs. Llandaff as if to apologize for neglect. In a moment she came back and waited once more.

"I want—" the lady paused; "bring me something—anything."

Katharine smiled again. She hesitated slightly, then she said,

"Everything has a tin spoon in it here."

She laughed a little, meeting the stranger's understanding glance.

"I know it. I really came to see you." The girl flushed deeply. "But bring me some cake and tell me when you will be at liberty. I want you to come up to the Atlantic. No, I will take you out driving — that will be better. Tell me when you have a spare hour. I want a long talk with you. I can't say anything here. Oh, that woman wants something. You must go."

The girl turned away. She mechanically went back and forth for the next five minutes obeying calls. She jostled against Joanna at the order window.

"Ain't it funny," said Joanna, "there's the public speaker again. Did you know it?"

"Yes, I know it," answered Katharine.

"I thought she had enough of it here last time. She couldn't eat a thing. What does she want now?"

"Some cake," in a low voice.

"Oh, dear! I'm glad I ain't got to wait upon her. Take her all kinds. But she won't want any. I sh'd think she'd stay away. Where's the young man?"

"What young man?"

"The one that was with her the other time."

"Oh, I don't know."

The two hurriedly separated.

"When are you at liberty?" immediately repeated Mrs. Llandaff as the girl came again.

Katharine could hardly put from her the feeling that

this stranger was making a mistake; that she would soon discover the mistake, and that would be the end of the matter.

But she answered with shy promptness,

"This week I have from eight until nine in the morning. I might be at liberty some other times, but I should not be sure of it. That is very early."

Mrs. Llandaff acknowledged that it was very early. She was rarely at her breakfast before nine. But she could always be governed by an impulse, provided the impulse were strong enough. And in this case it was.

"I will call for you at eight," she said.

Then she walked out and came near forgetting to pay for her order.

Joanna, half running by the empty chair and the untouched plate of cake, had occasion to say "I declare!" again and more strongly than ever.

She confided to Emma Taft, and also to Katharine at the first opportunity, that she guessed public speakin' wasn't good for women. It seemed to take away their wits somehow. And she wondered if that Llandaff woman was going to keep coming and ordering things. What was she up to, anyway?

Katharine looked at Joanna as she talked. She wondered "what a person must be made of" who could speak of that lady as "that Llandaff woman." She controlled the impulse she had felt to tell Joanna every word which had been said to her. And besides, deep in the girl's mind was a strong doubt as to whether any one would call for her to drive in the morning.

Everything was too strange. She tried to put the whole affair away from her; and as a result of this endeavor she thought of it more than before, if possible.

She could not sleep, save by little unrestful snatches, during which she dreamed of Mr Grove and her mother.

She was surprised that in her waking moments she should think of Mr. Grove so little. She had supposed she should

never stop thinking of him. And he hardly came into her mind, save when some tall man suddenly entered the restaurant.

Then her pulses would give a sickening jump, and seem to stop until she knew beyond a doubt that the tall man was not Marcellus Grove.

He had said that he wasn't going to plague the life out of her.

It had been hard for him to consent that she should come down here with Joanna. Still, when he was convinced that she would come whether he gave his consent or not, he gave it. There was a maddening sense of helplessness in his heart when he walked away from Mr. North's after that interview.

He had only remained in New York two days.

Contrary to Katharine's expectations, her mother had wished her to stay at home. The shrewd woman saw very well that if the girl remained at home she would be under her own eye, and would be where Mr. Grove might visit her.

But Mrs. North announced openly that she didn't pretend to have any right now to tell Kate what she must do or mustn't.

When a woman had a husband she must look to him for guidance.

At this remark Colburn North had not been able to restrain a satirical grunt. But he knew too much to make any articulate sound.

Mrs. North went right on to remark that if a husband couldn't tell his wife what was best, she didn't know what the world was coming to.

So Katharine took the place as waiter-girl which Joanna secured for her.

And her father drove her and her little trunk to the station.

Her mother kissed her a proper and loud kiss on her left cheek, and she told her to be sure and see that her clothes were aired well before she put them on.

Katharine was very unhappy all through the drive. She sat with her hand tucked under her father's arm. They did not speak a word save to say good-by as the train stopped.

When she was in her car, however, she gradually emerged from the deepness of the gloom upon her.

But her father, driving back to his thrifty and comfortable home, felt that the blackness was growing thicker about him.

He thought of the man over in the other part of the town who had been found hanging dead from a rope hitched to a beam in his barn.

He could almost have told himself that he envied that man. He had made an end to things.

Mr. North leaned his chin on his hand as his horse walked through a lonely piece of road.

"No," he thought, "I can't tie a rope to my neck as long as my little girl lives. She might need me. Though it's precious little I can do. Perhaps, though, just knowing I'm alive is a comfort to her. God knows I want to be a comfort to her. It's all there is in the world."

When Katharine rose the next morning at five o'clock, Joanna, who shared the bed with her, groaned that it was not time to get up yet.

"I know it. But I can't sleep. I'm going to the beach."

She dressed herself carefully, to be ready in case that lady should remember that she had said she would call.

Then she hurried out on to the shore. It was low tide. In ten minutes the waves would experience that mysterious change which should put life into them.

Now the ocean had withdrawn itself; it was sobbing a little in an undertone. The water rolled lazily, like oil, swashing faintly upon the sand and falling back languidly.

There was not a human being in sight as Katharine walked down the slope.

Some sand-pipers ran in their peculiar gliding way on before her. When she came too near they flew, then settled again on the sand.

There was no blue sky. Everything was softly gray. There was no wind; only a faint breath of air came from the east; it was as full of the odor of salt as it touched Katharine's cheeks as if she held a handful of that just-tossed-up Irish moss to her face.

The girl liked such days as these. They soothed her, without her knowing what it was that was so comforting. One of these gray, salt days was like the presence of a friend who likes you and approves of you. So Katharine felt it.

She need not be back at the café before half-past six. She strolled on and on. The space she had passed was just like the space that lay ahead of her. Sometimes there was a little stronger puff from the ocean.

She could not see the water, save the line where it touched the shore. But occasionally there came the sound of oars in rowlocks; of a man's voice giving some order; of the splash of water on a boat's side far off in the bay.

Katharine already knew how early the perchers and codders sometimes went out to catch for the hotel tables. On clear days she saw them start from the stony beach which curved between two bluffs off at the right, as she stood in front of the café and gazed about her when there was a lull in the orders.

Everything was very different from Feeding Hills. It was like being in another world.

She almost thought that it might be possible that she herself was another girl. That would be so lovely—to be another girl, and to begin life free.

Not that she was particularly conscious of not being free. A chain may be so light and loose that it seems not to fetter.

And Katharine's spirits were now unusually high; she was so young and healthy and busy, and in a new place. There was only Joanna to remind her of anything disagreeable; and Joanna had plenty of subjects of her own for thought, the chief among them being the travelling sales-

man. Besides, Joanna was fond of Kate in that superficial, thoughtless kind of a way in which a girl who has a travelling salesman may be fond of one who is not so fortunate.

This morning Joanna was tried, as she told herself, that Kate should have taken a notion to get up in this way. And she could not go to sleep again, because she happened to ask herself if anything were the matter. Kate was so different. That was the most provoking thing. She was different, and yet—

Having come, after many yawns, to this last phrase, Joanna sat up in bed.

It was a room only a few feet larger than the bed which stood in it. It had a window in the roof which was tilted up on an iron support.

Joanna put her head to this window and sniffed. She looked out upon the ocean.

"It's just as cloudy as it can be," she said petulantly. "And I wonder where Kate has gone to. I don't know what she can want to walk on such a beach as that for. I wonder if that is her," as her eyes lighted on one figure moving slowly towards Point Allerton. "I shouldn't wonder if she walked clean over to Hull."

Joanna dressed. She twisted her hair back and set her hat firmly down over the small wads of hair that were confined by her crimpers. It was "terrible hard to keep one's hair in crimps at the shore."

She thought she should buy one of those little fringes of hair such as some of the other girls wore. She could fasten such a fringe across her forehead, and the dampness didn't seem to affect hair like that.

She hurried down over the heavy, clogging sand until she came to the hard, wet floor of the beach. It was lonesome to her without any people round and no band playing. And how disagreeable that kind of a moaning noise the water made sounded!

She wished that she hadn't come out. She kept going on.

Yes, certainly, that must be Kate; she was just turning up to that old, half-buried wreck. She would probably sit down there, and if Joanna did not go and call her she might keep on sitting there and not be on hand to wait upon the folks between seven and eight. There were some people who always came to breakfast then, and Kate was one of the waiters. Joanna herself didn't begin work until an hour later.

It was Katharine who was sitting on the wreck. And she was in a mood by this time which fully justified her friend in thinking that she might forget to come back to wait upon the seven-o'clock "mealers."

"If I hadn't got her here, I s'pose I shouldn't feel so kind of responsible," said Joanna as she walked squarely on, not looking at water or land, and wishing, as she went, that this kind of air did not take the curl out of her hair so quick.

It was rather a long walk, and it was many minutes before the wreck seemed to grow any nearer and Katharine's figure to become more defined and recognizable.

When Joanna was within a few rods of her friend, a horse cantered into sight from behind one of the hills. The horse bore a man on his back and was coming on rapidly.

Joanna paused. A glow of anger mingled with the glow of exercise on her face.

Katharine was certainly very queer. Had she come out here to meet some one?

The next moment she had grasped Kate's arm, and had said angrily that she hoped Kitty wouldn't lead her such a chase again. And who was that man, anyway?

Katharine turned a bewildered, absent face towards this sudden questioner. She rose and seemed to throw off some power which had held her.

"Is it time for me to tend the tables?" she asked. "I forgot. But it can't be time either."

But Joanna did not reply. She was looking towards the horseman, and now she said,

"Why, it's the public speaker's young man, ain't it?"

It certainly was Owen Llandaff. He had ridden over to Hull by the road, and he was now coming back by the beach.

He unconsciously slackened his horse's pace somewhat when he saw the two girls at the wreck.

They stood holding each other's hands, staring undisguisedly at him. And he stared at them, though not nearly so undisguisedly; and, if the truth must be strictly stated, he saw only one of them, Katharine.

There was still left on her face the glow and the rapt, introverted kind of look which had come to it while she sat there "communing with nature," as the old phrase has it. There are some of the old phrases which still have rather a startling degree of meaning in them at times.

And young Llandaff was startled.

He said to himself, "It is that café girl;" then mentally he contradicted his own assertion.

He made his horse caracole, and under cover of this manœuvre he came still nearer.

Yes, it certainly was that café girl. He had had no idea that she had a face like that. It was a face like— His horse thundered off over the hard sand, and its rider did not finish his sentence. The fact that it was not finished, but must be finished some time, remained nebulously with him as something decidedly agreeable.

"Odd, ain't it?" remarked Joanna after a moment.

"What is it that's odd?"

"Why, that that young man should be on the beach this morning."

"Oh, they're everywhere," returned Katharine. "I suppose it's just as odd that we're here, don't you?"

She took Joanna's arm, and the two began to walk quickly back.

"I was worried," said Joanna, in an aggrieved tone, "because it seemed so strange for you to go out on the beach on a cloudy, dull morning like this. It's just 's lonesome 's it can be."

"Cloudy? Lonesome?"

Katharine took her hat off and shook back her hair. "I think it's beautiful. It's—"

Her ardent voice stopped. She bethought herself in time that her companion might think she was crazy if she went on in that way. Joanna was quite likely to think any one was crazy who saw things in a very different way from what she herself saw them.

Katharine was in season for her morning duties.

As she distributed fried perch she thought she had never disliked the odor of hot grease as she did this morning. She ought to have been hungry after her walk, but she could not eat.

The sense of expectancy upon her was so eager that it was almost poignant.

Of course that lady would not remember. When it was ten minutes after eight the girl was suffering so that it seemed as if she must cry aloud. But she did not. She stood outside on the platform, her pale face and hot eyes turned steadily, but quietly, towards the head of the beach.

She did not know in what kind of a carriage Mrs. Llandaff would come, if she came.

Katharine had known that she cared, but she was surprised now to find that she cared so much.

Five minutes went by. A sharp despair was settling on the girl's heart. How worse than foolish it was for her to have expected anything!

And yet it was strange that that lady should have done such a thing.

"Oh, Kate!" exclaimed Joanna's awe-struck voice close to her. Joanna seized her arm. "What do you think? That public speaker is right out here. She's after you. She said she wanted Katharine North. I s'pose that's you. Though I don't know what the deacon would say to that" —here Kate shrank visibly—"and she's telling Mr. Jackson that he must excuse you if you are not back by nine, and Mr. Jackson is smiling 'n' squirming no end, 'n' saying

'Yes, ma'am, yes. We c'n easy put another girl in her place.' Oh, my! Ain't you in luck? I wonder if you'll see her young man. Tell us all about him if you do; be sure."

At this point Katharine had twisted her arm free, and now she hurried round to the other door.

There was Mrs. Llandaff in a light single carriage, holding the lines herself, and alone.

"Get right in," she said, with that sort of suave abruptness which she sometimes used. "I'm a little late; but I've arranged with this gentleman"—here profuse smiles from Mr. Jackson—"and we need not hurry back."

She turned the horse skilfully. The creature shook his head and started joyfully along the road.

Joanna stood a moment gazing. She was joined presently by Emma Taft.

They agreed that it beat all. And they accounted for this state of things by the fact that Mrs. Llandaff was at once a woman and a public speaker. Therefore it must not be accounted strange that she had come and taken Kate off in this way.

In the carriage Mrs. Llandaff remarked,

"We will get away from these people."

And then she said nothing more until they were on one of those roads in Cohasset that are still comparatively lonely, even in "boarder-time."

As for her companion, she sat perfectly still. Sometimes she glanced shyly down at the perfectly fitting gauntlets on the hands that were holding the reins. But she did not look any further, and she did not speak.

It did not seem to her necessary that anything should be said. Even the extreme curiosity that had possessed her was gradually giving place to a sensation of comfort and happiness such as she had not before known.

Suddenly Mrs. Llandaff broke the silence. But first she guided the horse from the road to the shelter of a pine-tree. The sun had by this time driven away the easterly clouds.

She turned towards the girl and looked at her steadily, almost intensely, so close was the scrutiny she gave.

"You ought to know me," she said. She smiled slightly. "It would be one of the sweetest things that ever happened to me if you should look in my face now and call me—tell me, have you no idea what you ought to call me?"

At the sound of that voice in that cadence, saying such words to her, the girl turned slowly towards the woman beside her.

Occasionally in our lives things happen that seem so unreal that no effort on our part can at first make them seem otherwise. And yet they are as real as the most ordinary, sordid, every-day act.

In fact, reality is often so very beautiful that it would be immediately rejected as "material" by a "realist."

Katharine's hands involuntarily clasped themselves together on her lap.

"No," she said, "it is impossible. That would be truly impossible."

She was gazing steadily into Mrs. Llandaff's face.

"Would you like it if it were possible?" asked the elder woman.

"Oh, yes!" whispered Katharine.

"Well?" said Mrs. Llandaff.

"Then you are my Aunt Kate?"

"Yes. Truly, I am. You are sure you're not sorry?"

"Sorry?"

Katharine made a slight movement towards Mrs. Llandaff. There was sometimes about the girl an entire absence of self-consciousness.

She bent her head until her forehead touched the woman's shoulder.

"How lovely it is!" she said, still in a whisper.

"Do you think so?"

Mrs. Llandaff's face was softly radiant.

"Oh, yes!" again, and still in a whisper.

She kept her head where she had placed it. She closed her eyes as if she were keeping a vision within them.

As for the elder woman, some unaccustomed and stinging tears came to her eyes; they shut out the landscape, and seemed to shut her in with this girl who was so near of kin to her, and so very near in heart.

She put her arm about the slender figure.

"It was cruel to keep from me the knowledge that you were in the world," she said at last.

It was natural that she should not at first blame herself in the least for all her ignorance of affairs in Feeding Hills.

"Didn't you know there was such a person?"

Katharine now lifted her head. She spoke with more animation.

She already had an exquisite sense, and for the first time in her life, of what it was like to be with one with whom she was free to be herself, safe not to be misunderstood.

"No. I didn't even know your mother had married. But," she added, "I suppose I am to blame for my ignorance."

"And you are Aunt Kate? Aunt Kate?"

Katharine moved her hand until her fingers touched the edge of the light wrap which her companion wore.

"I used to dream about my Aunt Kate," she said. "I always dreamed such beautiful things, too. I wished that I could make the dreams come oftener, but I couldn't. My mother used to tell me that—"

Here Katharine paused and blushed. But she went on:

"She would say to me, 'That was just like your Aunt Kate,' and that I 'took after my aunt.' I don't know why, but I was always proud when she said so."

"But she said it when you had displeased her?"

"Yes," reluctantly.

"That being the case, you can understand that your mother and I didn't get on well together. And perhaps neither was to blame."

"Oh, I can understand that so well," eagerly. "I don't know how it is, but mother—"

Here the girl paused and inhaled a long breath.

It seemed to her that she was talking very easily and freely. But she could not help it.

"I know your mother perfectly well."

Mrs. Llandaff's tones had a slight ring in them which she had not intended should be there.

"Finally I asked father," said Katharine, "what there was about my Aunt Kate. You see, I suppose you know that mother didn't exactly approve of you, somehow."

Katharine stroked Mrs. Llandaff's mantle and looked up in Mrs. Llandaff's face, which was now turned quickly towards her as its owner asked,

"And what did your father say?"

"He said you were all right." Katharine laughed gently.

"I'm much obliged to your father. And what is your own impression of me, little one?"

"Oh, you know very well."

"But we sometimes like to be told what we may already guess."

Mrs. Llandaff drew her arm more tightly about the girl. She was surprised at the depth of pleasure this interview gave her, intent upon bringing it about as she had been. But then she had had experience enough to know that the things we seek most strenuously do not always reward us in the having.

"What is your impression of your Aunt Kate, now that you are face to face with her? Does she disappoint you?"

The young eyes and the older eyes met each other for a moment.

Katharine's lips were parted in that way which gives such a touching and ardent expression to a youthful face.

"Oh, Aunt Kate," she said, after a silence. "As though a woman like you could disappoint any one!" She clasped her hands again as she went on, "You are—you are lovelier even than I had dreamed you were. I haven't any words. I don't know why I was let to know you, I'm sure. Perhaps it was to—to make up to me, you know. But you

don't know. I don't want to think of anything but happiness now."

"Now you are wise," responded Mrs. Llandaff. "Let us think only of happiness."

But the smile which accompanied these words was a somewhat tremulous one.

IX.

MR. GROVE HEARS SOME NEWS

Mrs. Llandaff may have been something of an epicurean in the matter of the sensations she experienced. She had acquired considerable skill in selecting circumstances and situations with a view to rejecting what were likely to produce disagreeable emotions, and accepting what would produce pleasant feelings.

She used sometimes to say, with an enigmatical smile, that judgment in such selection and rejection was the one grand philosophy of life.

It had never transpired what Mrs. Llandaff's husband thought of this philosophy of life. Evidently a residence with him in Wales was not one of the circumstances which this woman considered would be likely to produce anything agreeable.

That her manner of ordering her life might possibly partake of the selfishly Sybaritic came home with a peculiar force to Mrs. Llandaff as she sat in the shade of that pine-tree with her newly found niece.

She wondered that it should be so. She was hurriedly thinking of what she would do for the girl beside her.

The girl herself had talked in that desultory way into which we fall when we are free and have a sense that our presence is a pleasure to some one.

Katharine had not said anything of any consequence, but she had liked to talk. And now she fell into a sweet silence. She leaned back on the seat beside her Aunt Kate. It was delightful to be thus near her Aunt Kate. That in itself was enough.

She had been saying how dull she had been not to suspect, even when she had been told that her aunt had married a Llandaff. But she had no more thought it possible that she should ever see her Aunt Kate than that—here a hesitation, and then a happy laugh; then silence again.

After all, it did not amount to much to talk.

It was best to sit perfectly quiet there and look off to where the water glittered, and where the great shaft of Minot's Light rose up against the now blinding blue of the eastern sky.

Sail after sail followed, apparently in a single wake, down towards the southern coast of the bay. A steamer trailed its line of smoke through the bright air.

Somewhere, close to the shore, on an excursion-boat, a band suddenly began to play "When Johnnie comes Marching Home," and the sound was borne far inland by the still pungent sea-breeze.

Mrs. Llandaff also leaned back upon her seat. The reins hung idly from her left hand. She had withdrawn her arm from its embrace of the girl beside her, but she still maintained the tender, protecting air which she felt from the first was the only manner that would express her attitude towards her niece.

Therefore Katharine did not miss the arm.

This was the ideal Aunt Kate of whom she had dreamed. How incredible that she should also be the real Aunt Kate! Then such things did happen. It was really possible that a person might fulfil every exaction.

The girl was continually withdrawing her eyes from their roaming, to let them dwell furtively but with keenest thankfulness upon the woman beside her.

At last Mrs. Llandaff caught the glance as it came back to her. The two smiled at each other.

"Well?" said the lady, in that way she had which was usually obeyed.

Katharine laughed out.

"I wasn't even thinking," she said. "You'll call me

stupid enough if I don't even think. But it's just beautiful not to think at all. Don't you call it so? You see I've been worried—"

The girl's face clouded somewhat. But it immediately lightened again. It really seemed to her that now she could put her anxieties right out of her life. Coming here to the shore had helped her greatly. She could not bear to think of Feeding Hills or of her home in any way. Even to recall her father was distinctly painful, because she was obliged to recall so much else besides her father.

But now it appeared as if she might almost forget what had happened. At least she should recall it less and less often. It would be impossible to have much in her mind that made her uncomfortable while she could know that there was always a chance that she might see her Aunt Kate.

Mrs. Llandaff was preoccupied.

"Oh, yes," she said absently, "any one might see that you are naturally stupid—and stolid. But we will correct all that. What a stolid little chin it has, to be sure!"

She reached forth and put her finger under the sensitive chin and lifted Katharine's face.

"Do you mean it?" eagerly asked the girl. "I know my chin slants back too much, and that it isn't very big, but—oh, you're only laughing at me, Aunt Kate."

And Katharine laughed again. She felt at once very bold and very shy. Thus she was able to say,

"It is something like your chin, so it must be all right."

She looked about her and then up to the sun.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I'm afraid it's getting very late, and they'll want me at the café. You'll have to take me back. It's dreadful, but you surely will have to take me back—Aunt Kate."

She made a slight, delicious pause each time before she pronounced her companion's name.

"I'm trying to decide whether I'll take you back at all," answered Mrs. Llandaff.

"Oh, but you know I have to work there. It wouldn't do to lose my place. I might not be able to get another all summer. I might have to go home. It really is late, I'm afraid. Do you mind driving over to the café with me? There may be a crowd there. Somebody said there was an excursion of pasters coming down to-day."

"Pasters of what?" asked Mrs. Llandaff, still absently. She was hardly hearing what the child said.

"On shoes, somehow. I don't exactly know how. But they'll come to the café. They all do. I must be there. But it's hard to go back after having had this lovely time."

Mrs. Llandaff gathered up the reins and turned the horse towards the shore.

Poor Katharine felt that her little hour was over. She sank back and gazed steadily ahead of her. The woman glanced at her and saw the sorrowful curves about the mouth. But she said nothing.

When the café was in sight Katharine sat upright with a resolute movement.

Her face had a touching expression of resolve and regret as she said,

"You've been very kind—Aunt Kate. I'm so thankful I've seen you. I shall always be happy thinking I've met you. And you're just as I wanted you to be—only better. I'd rather get out here, please, and walk the rest of the way."

Mrs. Llandaff drew in the horse.

"Very well. Good-by, little one. I mean to see you again. If there were not so many to look at us I should kiss you good-by."

"Good-by," unsteadily. Katharine stepped out on to the road. She felt as if her heart were breaking. But she was extremely quiet. She stood and watched the little carriage as it went swiftly back towards the head of the beach.

She stood after it was out of sight. She was getting herself in hand.

What a sordid, disagreeable place that was at the café!

She began to walk slowly towards it.

"I'm glad I've got the situation, anyway," she said aloud. "And I shall do just as well as I can. I wonder if she'll ever care to see me again. What if my mother had been like that! But she isn't. She isn't any more like that than as if they were not both women. Oh, how strange the world is! How shall I ever get along in it? And now I shall have such a longing to see her again that it'll seem to take all my strength away from me. Of course it can't be the same to her. That wouldn't be reasonable."

Katharine looked so spent and white when she walked in at the rear of the restaurant that Joanna, coming back laden with empty dishes, exclaimed,

"You look tired to death, Kitty. I guess your ride ain't done you much good. You'll have to pitch right in now. There's an awful crowd here."

Katharine was glad to "pitch in." She thought that she didn't care how many people came to her tables.

When Mrs. Llandaff reached her room at the hotel she flung off her bonnet and removed her gloves with the air of one who has something in mind to do immediately. She placed writing materials on the table and sat down before them.

Then she did nothing but put her head back on the chair and close her eyes. She remained thus a long time, but she did not look as if she were asleep.

When at last she did rouse herself her movements were decided. She wrote a short note.

When she traced the words "Dear Sister Roxy" she smiled satirically.

It was this letter which Mrs. North received the next day when her husband came home from attending to town business.

Neither she nor her husband knew the writing. Mr. North tossed the missive on the table where his wife was kneading dough for yeast-bread.

"You've got a new correspondent," he said.

He sat down to wait until Roxy should see fit to open the envelope. He knew she would finish kneading the dough first, and she did, with thoroughness and deliberation.

But she was curious to know what was in that envelope, with its long letters making the words "Mrs. Colburn North."

At last she had the sheet unfolded. Mr. North sat looking intently at her.

"It's dreadful queer writing," said Mrs. North. Then as she made out "Dear Sister Roxy" she exclaimed,

"It's Katharine! Now, what's she want, I sh'd like to know."

Colburn rose and began to walk. He had had some experience as to the time required for his wife to read anything in writing. When she undertook to read a letter it was as if she had set to work to decipher cuneiform inscriptions. She pored; she spelled; she held the paper at different distances from her eyes; she tried this word and that.

All this process seemed to be intensified now.

Once she looked up and remarked that it was very strange that her sister Katharine hadn't ever learned to write better than that.

Mr. North paused in front of her.

"Just let me have a go at it," he said, extending his hand.

"No," she replied, "I guess I'll study on it a little while longer."

"All right," said Mr. North, turning away in desperation. "I s'pose, though, it's only to thank you for your hospitality the other day."

He left the room and went to the barn. When he came in half an hour later he saw instantly a dull change in his wife's face.

The letter lay open on the table in front of where she sat.

"Well, Colburn," she said, "what do you think my sister's been 'n' done now?"

"I can't think of anything more unlikely than that she should want to board with you," was the answer.

"Pooh! Don't be a fool, Colburn," in her slow voice. "She's been 'n' found our Kate. That's what she's done, as near's I can make out. The ways of Providence are past finding out, I say."

Mr. North took the sheet of paper. His quicker mind grasped the meaning of the words written there. His face flushed. But he controlled himself.

"Well," he remarked coldly. "She seems to want to take Kitty with her. She seems pleased with the child."

"My sister is just the same as she ever was," said Mrs. North, repeating her old assertion.

"Very likely," responded her husband. "But that doesn't appear to me to be the question. She wants to take Kitty for an indefinite time. Practically that means for always."

The man restrained himself by a great effort. He merely asked,

"Do you think the child will be happier?" as if he had been referring to a crop of potatoes.

"That ain't the question," replied Mrs. North. "It's her everlasting good we must consider, Colburn."

"Don't you think, Roxy, that we might consider her present good a little?" he asked.

"Besides," ignoring her husband's words, "it ain't for us to decide. I guess you've forgotten Mr. Grove."

Mr. North slapped the letter on the table.

"The devil! So I had."

He sat down violently in a chair and gazed at his wife.

"I tell you, Roxy, that was the worst job you ever did. I really hope you'll live to see what you did."

"Colburn, I done it for her good. If I had it to do over again with them same lights I should do the same."

Colburn groaned.

"It isn't to do over again. It's done."

There was silence for some moments. Then Mr. North rose. He picked up his hat, which he had thrown on the floor.

"I'm going," he said,

"Where?"

"Where do you think? I'm going to harness and drive over to Grove's. I wish the man might be persuaded to apply for a divorce."

"Colburn! You wouldn't have a child of ours divorced, would you?"

"Oh, I don't know what I'd have."

He flung out of the house as he spoke. In ten minutes more his wife saw him drive from the barnyard and down the road.

She looked after him. Then she carefully folded the letter and put it in its envelope.

"My sister Katharine is just the same as she ever was," she said aloud.

She remained silent for some time longer. Then she said, again aloud,

"I shouldn't wonder a grain if the child was kind of taken with her."

An expression of something like suffering came into the broad, stolid face that was turned steadily towards the window."

She rose and placed the letter in the top of the old writing-desk. As she did so she was thinking,

"I should do just the same again with them lights. I done it for her good."

Mr. North found Deacon Grove in his store.

"Grove, I want to see you a minute," he said, with his usual abruptness.

When the two were in the little office, Mr. North began immediately,

"Here's Kitty's aunt found her down at the shore there, and she's writing that she wants to take the child away. I thought I'd tell you the first thing, you know."

Mr. Grove was standing, leaning against the wall. He had his thumbs tucked into his trousers pockets in an attitude that did not accord with the angry stare that now came to his face.

It seemed to him that he was a very ill-used man, and he could not help blaming North in some measure. He must blame somebody.

Of course it was known everywhere now that Kate hadn't been ill; that the amount of the whole thing was that she had run away from him the moment she was married to him. Deacon Grove knew that he was pitied and secretly laughed at. He writhed inwardly. He was continually asking himself what he should do about it. And he had not yet answered that question. There didn't seem to be a thing to do; only, as some one advised him, "just grin and bear it."

But he felt every day more and more strongly that grinning and bearing it was getting to be an absolutely unendurable state of existence.

And now here was the girl's father coming and telling him that some aunt had turned up and wanted to take his wife.

The deacon removed his thumbs from his pockets and thrust in his entire hands. Even in that attitude he did not feel sure that he would be able to grapple with the problem before him.

"Wants to take Kate away?" he repeated. "What do you mean? Where does she want to take her to?"

"Oh, I don't know. The letter sounds as if she wanted to have her always. Kind of adopt her, I guess. I thought I'd tell you," in rather helpless repetition.

"Have her always! I say, North, ain't this thing gone about far enough?"

Mr. North, who had put himself in the one chair of the office, stretched out his legs and looked gloomily at his feet.

"It's gone a damned sight too far, I think," he said.

"What do you mean by that?" rather blusteringly inquired the deacon. He must bluster a little or choke.

"You know what I mean well enough. But it's no use going back to that. What's done is done."

Mr. Grove was clinching his hands tightly in his pockets, and he was scowling deeply.

"I guess it'll all come out right, somehow," he said a moment later, somewhat defiantly.

"I'm sure I hope so."

Mr. North rose.

"I don't know's I have anything more to say. I've done my errand. I was bound to tell you what Mrs. Llandaff wrote. I'll go home now."

"Don't hurry. I tell you, North, I'm in a mighty poor kind of a position."

Mr. North looked at the man near him.

"I don't think my girl's in a much better position. And she's nothing but a girl. I guess you can stand it."

The father turned suddenly away.

"Did you say that woman's name is Llandaff?"

Deacon Grove put this inquiry after a silence.

"Yes."

"Is it the public speaker?"

"I believe so. It makes no difference that I know."

"I declare, this is tough!" Mr. Grove spoke from a very full heart.

He started forward.

"I'll go down to the shore. I can get there to-night if I take the next train."

His companion caught his arm and held it uncomfortably tight.

"Grove," began Mr. North. Then he stopped. Almost immediately he began again, "Grove, shall you see Kitty?"

"Of course; that's what I'm going for."

"If you see her," went on Mr. North, as if he had not heard the answer, "don't be hard on her. If you should be hard on her, Grove, I don't know what I should do. I don't know but I should kill you."

He dropped the deacon's arm and walked out of the office and out of the store.

Mr. Grove was moved for a moment. Then he began to pity himself, and to fume more and more.

He hurried out and harnessed the colt. He took one of

his clerks into the buggy, and he drove down to the station. He took the Boston train, and he was one of that stream of human beings that issued so many times a day from the steamboat which called at the Nantasket Landing.

Having got on to the landing, he paused for a short time to think exactly what he should do. He had been thinking on precisely this subject all through the journey, and he had not yet come to any decision.

Even in this moment, however, he stood up very straight, conscious that he had on his best suit. And no state of mind could prevent his giving a more or less keen attention to the women who might be in sight.

The most notable feminine being visible just now was sitting upon a horse close to a young man who was also on horseback.

"Really," Mr. Grove thought, "she holds herself well. I don't care much for oldish women, myself, but—"

Here he unconsciously straightened himself again. And here, also, Mrs. Llandaff turned her head and looked at him.

It needed but one glance to enable her to class him correctly.

"Owen," she cried to her escort, "look at that man there. And yet they call women vain!"

Llandaff glanced. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's not a bad fellow," he answered.

"But his eyes are too near together. I've seen too many faces not to know something about them."

Mr. Grove remained with as unconscious an air as he could assume until the two cantered slowly up the wharf.

They were the kind of people he envied. And he lingered, too, because he dreaded to meet Katharine. Before he met her he believed he could talk glibly and convincingly. But when she was before him, looking at him in that way she had, he suddenly became aware that there was no power in the words he had arranged. He did not know what to make of it all. There must be some way of getting the better of that girl. And he must find it.

He was not very well acquainted with the shore. He tried not to seem like a stranger as at last he walked up the planking. He was continually throwing his head back, lest he should not appear sufficiently at his ease.

He did not know which was Jackson's café, and he did not wish to inquire. It seemed to him that it would be rather green not to know all about things down here. He guessed he'd let them know he wasn't green, anyway.

He had bought a buttonhole bouquet in Boston, and it was now fastened to the lapel of his coat. He congratulated himself upon his forethought and knowledge of the world. He swaggered somewhat as he joined the people moving back and forth among the hotels and eating-houses.

The band began to bray forth a sprightly air. There were odors of coffee and flowers and cigars on the air. The wind was southwest, and not a puff of salt was perceptible.

"Fellows and girls;" gentlemen and ladies; elderly women with gray hair and that genially reserved manner which goes with a certain dash of gray on the head; large, fat men in irreproachable dress, smoking excellent cigars, and having a cane under one arm; fancifully clothed children running and shrieking and dominating everything; people in the dining-room sitting over sherbet or drinks which held clinking pieces of ice—Mr. Grove strolled among all this, and he grew more and more angry as he walked.

So this was the kind of place where his wife was. She was staying here, and he was drudging at home.

His mouth, under its adornment of hair, shut in a very unpleasant curve.

"I guess I've been kind of mild with her long enough," he was thinking. "I guess I'll try the other kind of thing. I reckon the law favors a man and wife living together. This is a fooling that's lasted long enough."

He asked a boy where Jackson's restaurant was, and he strode on purposefully after he had been told.

He stood in the doorway, looking in upon the crowd. It was the busiest time of the day.

As he looked Mr. Grove began to doubt the story that had been told him that Katharine was a waiter-girl here. He began to doubt almost everything. He was just being made a fool of—that was the whole story. And he would stop it. Yes, he'd stop it before he was a day older.

There was Joanna Damon. It was true about her being here, then.

Joanna, in the full tide of "tendin' her tables," almost ran against the deacon.

He nodded, and said: "How de do, Joanna!" but he would not ask her a question.

He walked through the room and sat down at the first vacant place he could find.

Joanna, as she went back to that region from whence clams and ice-cream issued in equal abundance, was, as she explained to Katharine, "all of a tremble."

"Now don't you be took by surprise," she said in her friend's ear. "He was sure to come. 'N' he has come. But he ain't to one of your tables. He belongs to Emma Taft. I'm thankful for that."

Katharine let fall a sugar-bowl. Mr. Jackson, at the far end of the room, looked up; then he jotted down the price of two sugar-bowls against Katharine's wages.

But the girl, whose mind was off somewhere with her Aunt Kate, was frightened more by Joanna's face than by her words. The latter she had not understood.

"Who belongs to Emma Taft?" she asked, lifting a bewildered face from where she was stooping to gather up the sugar and the broken crockery.

"I sh'd think you'd know. Deacon Grove has just come in. It makes it horrid, don't it?"

And Joanna, out of the kindness of her heart, hastily whispered,

"But if you say you're sick I'll tend to your tables somehow, if I break my neck doing it."

Katharine rose.

"No," she said. "I'm not sick." She put her free hand suddenly to her bosom. "I'm only faint—or something."

"Go right to our room," directed Joanna.

"No," said Katharine again. She stood erect, with a quick access of strength.

She went into the back room with the ruined bowl. She returned immediately. Her face and body were tense and alert. But she looked so cold that Joanna was almost offended that her news had had no more lasting effect.

"After all," she thought, "Kate was one of them kind who didn't feel much."

She was sure that she herself should "jest have a fit right on the spot if she'd been in Kate's place."

But Katharine did not have a fit. She walked along the room and took the orders.

She knew that Deacon Grove was staring intensely, and it seemed to her indignantly, at her.

Very soon she brought herself to look at him and bend her head slightly in greeting. He nodded stiffly.

When he had been given the pie and tea he had ordered, he beckoned to her. And there was a show of authority in his movement.

She paused by his table and looked fixedly at the line between his eyes.

"When do things slack up here?" he asked.

"At about half-past nine."

"All right. You be round."

Katharine turned away.

At the first chance, while Mr. Grove was elaborately drying his moustache after his tea, she paused again at his table.

Her pause was like the lighting of a bird—it was so swift and had such an aloofness about it.

"I cannot see you to-night," she said.

"Why not?" sharply.

The man was still under the influence of the resolve that there should be no more fooling. He was going to know what was what now. And more—this girl was going to know it, too.

"Not to-night," she repeated. Then she went away.

Deacon Grove pushed back his chair and snatched up his check.

It did not seem to him that this trumpery restaurant, or the whole shore itself, could contain him. His eyes burned. But his hands, when he took his change, trembled and were covered with a cold perspiration.

He got out of the house as soon as he could.

He went down towards the water because he did not know what else to do.

Here he was again, helpless before that little thing—that child. He knew very well that it would be entirely useless for him to try to see her that night. He should not try. He would escape the humiliation of that defeat.

But one thing he could do: he could stay around here until she would see him. She'd get mighty sick of seeing him hanging about every day. And she'd be glad to see him. He didn't care if his business went to thunder. He hoped it would go to thunder, and the sooner the better. He was going to have things different.

He made great strides over the sand. He blustered there alone until he was somewhat calmer.

Then, feeling the need of something to take up his mind, he continued his walk towards the head of the beach.

One of the great hotels was so brilliantly lighted, when at last it became really dusk, that Mr. Grove strolled up to it, telling himself that he might as well see what there was to see. If it was a hop, he would look in at the windows. He never objected to seeing fine women in fine clothes. Least of all when he wanted to "take up his mind."

Carriages were continually driving up, and men and women were alighting. They seemed to pay money at the door.

"What is it, anyway? Can anybody go in?" he asked at last of the door-keeper.

The man looked at him in commiseration.

"Any one who pays a dollar. Mrs. Llandaff speaks again. And the money goes to the Ladies' United Association."

Mr. Grove took out his money promptly. If he could see that woman for a dollar he considered it cheap enough. She was the one who wanted Kate. Well, they'd soon find out who'd have her. He wondered if that woman knew her niece was married. Yes, indeed, he would certainly have things settled this time.

The great dining-room was furnished with settees. At one end was a small platform and a table. Mr. Grove went along between the rows of seats with his most assured air. Again he was glad he had the flowers in his buttonhole. He noticed that a great many of the men had flowers in their coats.

He sat down. He pulled out his beard complacently. He had a feeling that this was the kind of society he could adorn.

But as the moments went by his anxiety to see that Llandaff woman increased, until he felt that he was becoming almost nervous.

He might have to see Mrs. Llandaff and explain a few circumstances to her.

There was that young fellow he had seen on horseback at the wharf. He was just at the door now, and a lady had his arm.

Then there ran over the audience that unmistakable emotion which betokens an arrival which has been waited for.

X.

TO ANOTHER LIFE

Some one behind Mr. Grove said in an audible whisper,

"Is that she? That one with the young man who has the eyebrows?"

Mr. Grove waited with great attention for the answer.

"Yes. That's Mrs. Llandaff."

"She isn't as old as I thought she was. Well, I am glad to see her."

"Old? Well, she isn't exactly a chicken. But she's one of the kind of women who never grow old. There seem to be a few of that sort distributed through the centuries. Ninon de l'Enclos was one of them."

"But you don't compare Mrs. Llandaff with that dreadful Frenchwoman?"

The deacon heard a slight laugh with the reply,

"Oh, no; I don't compare Mrs. Llandaff with any one."

He wondered what in the world they meant. And who was that woman to whom the man referred who had such a name? Mr. Grove was irritated that he did not know.

For the moment the flowers in his coat did not sustain him. He almost felt like any other common man who lived in the country, and who had not the faintest idea as to who that immortal Ninon was. He would look in the encyclopædia in the library at the west part of the town. He made a mental note that the word began with N, and that was as far as he could go.

All the time he was staring with unswerving eyes at the lady who had mounted the platform, and who had calmly seated herself in the chair there.

He recognized her as the one he had seen on horseback at the wharf.

He also had an uneasy sense that he should not want to contend with her. He didn't know exactly why. And as he continued to look his admiration increased. She was what he called a "mighty fine woman." He wondered if being a public speaker made her carry herself like that. And she was Kate's aunt. She might be Kate's aunt. But how in the name of everything wonderful could she be Colburn North's wife's sister?

The power of this question almost paralyzed the man to whom it came.

A woman in a long green dress, with immense fluffs of lace about her neck, who was sitting on the platform with Mrs. Llandaff, now leaned forward and conversed with that lady for a brief space.

After this conversation she rose and came to the very edge of the dais. She said that she knew there was no need of introducing the speaker of the evening; that she was already so well known throughout the length and breadth of the land that an introduction was merely a superfluous ceremony. Still, there was a possibility that some one might be present who did not know what Katharine Llandaff had done, not only for the Ladies' United Association, but for the women of the whole world.

Here a murmur of approbation, which caused the lady in the green dress to repeat "for the women of the whole world."

Mrs. Llandaff had opened new spheres of thought; she had given time and heart and brain to the cause of those women who were obliged to work for their living, to whom fortune had never been kind.

This speaker's voice might almost be described as a deep baritone, and she seemed exceedingly fond of the sound of it. Perhaps she did not fully take in the fact that the people were waiting for her to stop. Those who are fond of the sound of their own voices very rarely have an idea that others are not equally fond.

Still, a restive but very slight movement of a third lady who was also privileged to sit on the platform had a quelling effect upon the baritone voice, so that it somewhat abruptly continued,

"In short, ladies and gentlemen, I have the very great pleasure of introducing to you Mrs. Owen Llandaff."

There was tumultuous applause as the speaker of the evening rose and bowed.

She began speaking directly, and the applause was obliged to subside.

Young Llandaff, sitting in front of Mr. Grove and watching his step-mother, was aware that she would make to-night what the reporters would call "one of her best efforts." He knew all the signs. There was a brilliance in her eyes, and an instant thrill in the low voice in which she began that told him what to expect.

He leaned back and folded his arms, prepared to enjoy the next half-hour with a sincerity which custom had not yet been able fully to abate.

"Something has moved her," he was thinking. "And what has done it? Even I cannot always tell what does it. This crowd will get its money's worth this evening. They'll all think of the working-girl differently after this. Thank Heaven for that. My step-mamma is really—really—"

He did not try to finish the sentence. It trailed off into obscurity as Mrs. Llandaff's words penetrated more fully the senses of the people listening to her.

There is always something about a successful speaker which entirely eludes description. And it is that elusive something which, more than anything else, is the most powerful of all the attributes of that speaker. And this mysterious quality had been freely given to the woman who addressed the select assembly at this hotel.

She spoke about the girl who works for her bread. She spoke mostly to people who had never earned their daily bread, and who unconsciously thought of those who did so as of some curious kind of animal, which had the aspect of

humanity and which was endowed with speech—having this aspect and this endowment chiefly that they, the select few, might be the better served.

But for that half-hour, if for no longer time, they were compelled to think and to feel differently. The power of an incisive speech, a keen brain, and of a great personal magnetism was upon them. And such power usually sows some seed that germinates into action, that does not waste itself in mere emotion.

Mrs. Llandaff was very white when she turned and sat down after her speech.

Although she had as yet hardly acknowledged the fact to herself, yet all the time she had been speaking there had been one face before her mind—a sensitive, weary girl's face, where the eyes had dark rings round them, and where there was a pathetic quiver to the lips.

All the generalization in the world, all the statistics in regard to the hardships and the temptations of working-girls, had never so incited her to eloquence as had that one young face.

You see that women cannot see things powerfully in the abstract. A long row of figures proving unspeakable suffering might to Mrs. Llandaff have been only a row of figures.

"I suppose a factory-girl, for instance, has feelings," said one lady to her escort as he laid her wrap over her shoulders.

"And needs one flannel, with a proper sense of difference in the quality," he quoted from Mrs. Browning.

"You need not laugh at me. I am going to see that my servants have different times. I am, indeed. I never thought about them. I want to shake hands with Mrs. Llandaff. Of course you know her. All the men know her."

But Mrs. Llandaff seemed indifferent and almost cold to those who crowded up to congratulate her and to shake hands. She was, in truth, spent.

She smiled gratefully when her step-son hastened forward

and proposed that she should go to her carriage. He was even more attentive than usual.

When he sat down opposite her she said, wearily, that he was really nicer than he was ordinarily.

"Thanks. I ought to be. I never saw you look so used up in my life as when you turned from us to your chair. I really had thoughts of asking the lady behind me for salts. This evening must have added some years to your life. You know it is emotion that ages a woman, not time. But you seemed self-controlled. To seem controlled—and at the same time to feel deeply—that is the way to move others. A person must be a fool who cannot discern when one is cold and when he merely has himself well in hand."

As the young man talked thus his eyes were fixed on his companion. Her own eyes were lowered. Without raising them she said,

"Aren't you talking like a book, Owen? What have you been reading lately?"

"Nothing. I have been hearing you lecture, Mrs. Llandaff."

The lady lifted her eyes and looked at the young man sitting opposite. The electric lights shed a ghastly radiance on them both.

"Really, Owen, are you conscious of how much sweetness you are wasting upon your step-mother?"

"Fully conscious. Only I don't consider my sweetness wasted."

"Miss Wyckham would so consider it."

No response from the young man. He put on his most inscrutable face and sat smiling at his companion.

Presently he leaned slightly forward. He touched the lady's arm.

"I'm afraid that two working-girls have parted with more money than they could well spare for the sake of hearing you, Mrs. Llandaff. Their dollars do not come so easily."

The two looked at the side of the highway where Katharine and Joanna were hurrying along.

"I saw them there. They came in very late. They looked half dead with fatigue. I suppose they had been dealing out ice-cream on those thick plates. I wanted to get up and give them the best seats and money for their tickets. But I knew they would not thank me for doing either. I watched them. Mrs. Llandaff, one of those girls has a face which makes one immediately say, 'Something is going to happen to her.' I tell you I'd give a good deal if that something might be happiness."

When Llandaff ceased speaking his mouth shut in a way as if it would shut in far more emotion than it had allowed to escape in the words and the tone.

As for Mrs. Llandaff, she made no reply. She did not show that she had noted the man's voice.

"I wish you'd tell the driver to stop, Owen," she said quickly. "And I wish you'd walk up to the hotel. I will take those girls to that café."

Llandaff obeyed without speaking.

As he sprang out of the carriage Mrs. Llandaff leaned forward and spoke to the hurrying girls,

"Katharine, if that is you, I know you'll let me take you and your friend the rest of the distance."

The young man held open the door, lifted his hat, and walked away.

Joanna sat down in speechless surprise. She surrendered unconditionally to the temptation to stare at the lady opposite—at the lady and at the lovely evening gown she wore. She had not had half a chance, as she afterwards said, during the lecture to look at that gown. She had heard of such things. She wished her travelling salesman could see her in one like it.

A kindly, imperative hand had guided Katharine to a seat beside her aunt.

"If I had known you knew I was to speak, that you cared in the least to come, I should have sent tickets for you and your friend. It is cruel that you walked so far, and then that you should have paid hardly earned money."

"Kitty paid for me," said Joanna promptly. "I told her I couldn't no ways afford a dollar just for a lecture; though it was curious to hear a woman, of course. 'N' she couldn't afford it, neither."

Katharine was sitting perfectly still beside her aunt. She had made no effort to speak.

"I wanted to hear you," she said now. "And I didn't want to go alone. I didn't think much about the money. Though, of course, I couldn't afford it. But there are some things in this world a great deal better than money."

Here she sighed. Then she glanced shyly up at Mrs. Llandaff, who said with some vehemence,

"You ought to have sent word to me. You could have had tickets well enough."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Katharine hurriedly, "I wouldn't have sent word."

"Why not?" imperiously.

"Because—" shrinking somewhat, "I could not tell but that you had forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!"

"It wouldn't have been strange, you know—Aunt Kate. You have so many things to think of."

The girl was now smiling happily. She sat far back, her slight form shrinking into the corner, so that she might the better look at this wonderful aunt who had come out of some wonderful country to greet her, and who, alas! might at any moment go back into that wonderful country again to be seen no more in all her life.

Joanna sat there and gazed inordinately every time an electric light or a blaze from windows and door-ways allowed of such a gaze.

How extremely odd that Kitty hadn't told her that the public speaker was her aunt! It certainly was true that Kitty was growing odder and odder every day. Joanna, for her part, didn't know what her friend was coming to. But when a girl married a man and then went off somewhere and tended tables, what could you expect?

To tell the truth, you wouldn't know a thing what to expect.

So Joanna's thoughts ran on as the horses trotted, and no one spoke a word in the carriage.

Mrs. Llandaff sat with her cloak wrapped about her, her head thrown back on the cushions, absolutely silent after that exclamation.

Why try to talk before that girl with the round, staring eyes? Besides, she had talked enough that evening.

For hours after one of her speeches she would feel that human language was an extremely poor thing.

The horses were pulled up beside the tawdry café.

Joanna said she was, for her part, just as much obliged as she could be. It was awful hard to walk much after you'd been on your feet all day tendin' them tables.

Katharine said nothing. She was entirely content in silence. She walked up to her bedroom in that same delightful silence. She hoped that Joanna would not speak. She wanted to put her head on her pillow with Mrs. Llandaff's voice, as it had been that evening, still in her ears and in her heart. It was a kind of voice that, somehow, you heard with your heart instead of with any more outward organ.

Joanna was sleepy. She did not care to talk. But she hoped she should wake early enough in the morning to ask Kate why she had been so dreadful secret about the public speaker's being her aunt.

So Katharine put her happy head on her pillow. Her eyes shone on hour after hour in the dark, while the girl at her side breathed heavily.

When Mrs. Llandaff reached her room the first thing she did was to look on her writing-table for letters and telegrams. She turned over the envelopes listlessly. Then she rang impatiently. Her bell was always answered quickly.

No, there was nothing more. Everything had been put on the table, as she had directed.

She moved in an irritated, aimless manner about the room,

her dress trailing behind her, her cloak absently carried on her arm, her head bent.

Suddenly she sat down. "Shall I ever learn not to care so much?" she was thinking. "Or rather, let me learn to care only for my dinner and for my nap after it. Owen ought to come in. What rubbish was it he was saying about the child's looking as if something were going to happen to her?"

She rose and rang again.

"If Mr. Llandaff has returned," she said to the servant, "ask him to come here."

When Mr. Llandaff appeared, his step-mother told him to sit down. There was something she wanted to ask him.

Then she sat down again in the chair from which she had risen.

The young man lounged against the mantel, waiting.

He waited so long that at last he said that he didn't wish to hurry her, but did she really wish to put a question to him?

"Yes, I do. Owen, you are the frankest of creatures—in some ways. Then again you are as close as—as—"

"Let us say as a clam, when it does not wish to associate with the rest of the world," assisted Llandaff.

"Yes, a clam will do very well. I wanted to inquire if you are willing to tell me if you are going to ask Miss Wyckham to be your wife."

Llandaff took his arm down from the mantel. He half turned his face away. Then he looked full at the woman in the easy-chair in front of him.

"No, I am not going to ask her."

"Ah," in an anxious way.

"Because I have already put that question." He took out his watch. "It is only about eighteen minutes ago since I gave her the glorious opportunity to become your step-daughter."

"And what did she say?"

Mrs. Llandaff bent forward in undisguised earnestness.

"She was so kind as to say yes."

The lady sank back in her chair with an unmistakable air of satisfaction, and she repeated the little word "Ah" again, though with a different accent.

"I was going to tell you, Mrs. Llandaff."

"Thanks."

"I hope you approve."

"Decidedly. Miss Wyckham is irreproachable."

"So I thought.

"So intelligent."

"Oh, thank you."

"She has perfect taste, since she accepted you."

"Mrs. Llandaff, I prostrate myself at your feet."

"And she likes you?"

"Indeed, I hope so."

"Has the date been set?"

"We have not had time to come to that yet."

"I suppose not. But don't procrastinate. You have some formidable rivals, Owen."

"Is the audience over?"

"Yes, you may go. But stay." She rose and walked to the young man's side.

"Why are you so much pleased with this arrangement?" he asked, more quickly than he had yet spoken.

"I own I am pleased. There are two reasons. She is a good girl. That she is not poor is only a pleasing side issue. And, Owen, it is time that you should range yourself, as the French say."

The young man stood looking at her as she spoke. He had the kind of eyes that could sometimes penetrate while remaining themselves opaque. Such eyes have moments when they are very baffling.

"The third reason, and the real one, you do not give," he now remarked. "Is it, perhaps, that you are tired of having me dangling about you?"

"Tired of you?" Mrs. Llandaff's pale face glowed for an instant. She came still nearer. She put one arm over

the young man's neck and lightly kissed his cheek. "I want you to be happy," she said. "You've been a great comfort to me. You might be very happy." A slight pause. Llandaff was holding her hand in both his. "You could not be dearer if you were my own son," she went on. And then, with that abruptness which was sometimes characteristic of her, she said with her eyes on his face, "Of course you love her, Owen?"

He smiled.

"Of course. How absurd you are, Mrs. Llandaff."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

His eyes ceased to be impenetrable, and looked down, full of affection, into hers. Then he left the room.

Mrs. Llandaff turned and again tossed over the letters on the table. She wrote a telegram to Colburn North, and ordered it to be sent at the earliest moment in the morning.

She indulged in a few thoughts which were not complimentary regarding her sister Roxy. Then she went to her bedroom.

It was a very fine night outside. Llandaff, after pacing several times up and down that part of the piazza which overlooks the ocean, suddenly left the veranda and hurried along down the steep path which leads to the stony beach towards the east.

As he went he could see, over the dark, cottage-specked summit of Green Hill, the steady glow of Minot's beneath the brilliance of the heavens. And to the left, across the narrow peninsula of Nantasket, and the still waters of the harbor, the revolving gleam of Boston Light.

There was no band playing anywhere now. It was late. Somewhere over on the main road there was the sound of a drunken man singing. Sometimes the notes went up clearly, then failed utterly.

The water was sucking in and out among the small smooth stones.

Llandaff almost ran along the last steep incline of the

path. Having reached the beach, he sat down on one of those great pudding-stone rocks which have bitten into many a good ship in times past, and will bite into many a one in time to come.

Not being a smoker, he did not light a cigar. He simply sat and stared out upon the water, which, as it heaved gently up and down, bore upon its bosom glittering points of light.

The man's face, thrown back upon the rock behind him, showed in an ashen kind of way in this deep dusk. He was almost lying down, with his hat off and his hands clasped behind his head.

A man who has just become engaged usually has plenty of subjects for thought. This was the case with Llandaff upon this summer night. It seemed to him that his thoughts came a great deal faster than he could grapple with them, and some of them assumed such strange proportions that he suddenly jumped to his feet and began climbing up the path to the hotel.

He looked up to the window of Miss Wyckham's room; he smiled as he did so.

"So Mrs. Llandaff thinks I might better range myself," he was thinking. "How odd it is that one cannot have anything without giving up something."

With this enigmatical remark in his mind he went into the hotel.

In that little room under the roof of the café Katharine awoke suddenly from her late-coming sleep. And with her awakening there leaped upon her two thoughts—she had seen her Aunt Kate again, and Mr. Grove was at the shore.

Such thoughts seemed to have been lying in wait at the bedside as wild beasts lie in wait for their prey. They pounce upon one relentlessly.

The girl sat up in bed and looked about her. She pressed her eyes with the hot palms of her hands.

At thought of Deacon Grove her first impulse was to say a prayer. She wanted to ask God to help her. She felt piteously alone. Then she remembered how she had begged

of God a few weeks ago, and he had made no sign that he had cared about her.

She nerved herself; her slight figure began to stiffen as she sat there. She wondered when the interview would take place. She knew she could not shirk it. It must come.

Joanna began to yawn and stretch her arms over her head.

"I'll bet you'll have to see the deacon to-day, Kitty," she remarked.

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't talk so!" exclaimed Katharine. She shuddered nervously.

"Well, I'll bet you will," repeated Joanna immediately. "He looked jest as set as the everlastin' hills yisterday. I s'pose he's jest as mad's he can be, don't you?"

As Katharine did not reply, Joanna punched her and said again,

"He's jest as mad's he can be, ain't he?"

"I suppose he is," said Katharine reluctantly.

"And you'll have to go back with him, won't you?" went on Joanna.

"No," said Kate.

"Oh, my!" said Joanna.

She also now sat up in bed and gazed at her companion.

"It's jest as queer as the Old Harry, ain't it?" she cried.

No reply.

"What sh'll you tell him, Kate?"

"Oh, I don't know. I can't talk about it. I wish you'd let me alone, Joanna."

"Oh, jest's you say, of course."

Katharine put her head on her pillow again. Her heart was beating so that she breathed with difficulty. She believed that she could not endure a second struggle so soon.

She had thought she was quite strong and quite happy.

She lay with her face pressed into the pillow. She was thinking that life was too hard for her. She would almost rather give it up.

Then that indefinable glow which belongs to youth and to sensitive natures suddenly pervaded her frame.

After a moment she softly left the bed. She dressed quickly. Joanna had fallen asleep again.

While the girl was dressing she was saying over and over to herself in a low whisper,

"Father can't help me. Father can't help me."

She went out of the building and down on to the beach again. But this time she hurried along towards the Hingham highway.

She turned off and began to mount the hill on which the Atlantic House stands.

Some servant-girls were sweeping the halls and wiping the furniture. Everything looked deserted and desolate.

The girls gazed with unsympathetic, curious eyes at this new-comer.

Katharine had come up the steep hill so rapidly that at first she could not speak, but stood panting. She did not wish to pause a moment lest the spasmodic courage which had led her thus far might evaporate.

A man in riding-boots and corduroys came down the stairs. It was Owen Llandaff. He glanced with undisguised surprise at Katharine.

"Does she know any of these girls?" he asked of himself.

But observation immediately answered that question.

He went on and mounted the horse which now appeared, led from the stables.

Katharine advanced to the nearest girl.

"I want to see Mrs. Llandaff," she said.

"I hope you don't think Mrs. Llandaff sees folks at this time of day," was the reply.

"I've got to see her," said Katharine.

"Well, you can't do it, not this four hours yet."

Katharine was now strengthened by recklessness. The one thing left in the world for her was her Aunt Kate—that is, besides herself.

"I tell you I must see her now. Where is her room?"

"I sha'n't be responsible. It's No. 36."

"Up these stairs?"

"Yes."

Katharine walked up the stairs. It seemed dark in the halls. She groped futilely as one gropes in a dream.

But at last, her eyes having become accustomed to the dusk, she found the number and began knocking—feebly at first, then more loudly.

It seemed a long time before a voice the other side of the door asked,

"Is it a telegram?"

"No," said Katharine. She felt the blood come up to her face again.

"Well?" impatiently from the other side.

"It's Katharine. Aunt Kate, will you let me come in?"

The door opened instantly and closed again. And as it closed it was as if it shut away forever one phase of the girl's existence.

When the woman within the room drew Katharine into her arms she drew her into another life.

XI.

MR. GROVE PROVES DIFFICULT

BEFORE saying a word, Mrs. Llandaff, holding her niece with one hand, drew up the shades of the two windows until the room was brilliant with the morning light.

Then she turned again towards the girl and looked at her.

Katharine met that gaze with a gathering sense of safety and comfort. She almost began to wonder that she had been so disturbed.

"I hope you'll forgive me, Aunt Kate," she said hurriedly. "I know I could have endured it, and I shouldn't have changed my mind in the least. Nothing can ever make me change my mind. But I did dread it so! And all at once it seemed as though, if I could get to you, perhaps I shouldn't have to see him. I do hope you'll forgive me," she repeated with increased earnestness.

Mrs. Llandaff was listening intently, and she was watching the face before her no less intently.

She released the girl's hand. She drew her wool dressing-gown more closely about her and sat down on a couch.

"Come and sit here by me," she said. "Now," authoritatively, "tell me what it is you are talking about. Your words sound as if you had got up in a dream and come here. But don't worry about my forgiveness. It is delightful that you sought me. I must tell you that I have sent to your father, asking that I may take you with me. You certainly shall not stay in that restaurant if I have to abduct you with my own hands."

Katharine's eyes dilated. A sense of great joy was tak-

ing the place of the feeling of comfort. But this joy, of course, could not have any real foundation. She was already learning to distrust anything which wore the face of happiness.

Now she tried to be calm, and to say in an even voice,

"You ought to have sent to my mother."

Mrs. Llandaff smiled.

"Oh, I understood that. I wrote first to her. But she isn't rapid in her movements. She may be, even now, studying upon my letter. I'm not accustomed to wait. It is almost time to hear from your father. Thank fortune, his mind can act."

"And I should stay with you; I should go with you?"

As she asked this Katharine rose from her seat beside her aunt and stood before her.

"Yes."

"I should like that. That would be a kind of heaven, wouldn't it!"

"I hope so," responded the elder woman, to whom earthly arrangements did not now so readily seem like heaven as they had once done.

Here, with a puzzling gesture and a quick movement, Katharine walked away to one of the windows.

Mrs. Llandaff remained sitting. She watched her niece, waiting for her to tell what she had come to tell.

It was several moments before the girl spoke, and when she did so she kept her face towards the window.

"I don't think it's of any use, Aunt Kate."

"Why not?"

"You see, there's something dreadful about me," with continued averted face.

Mrs. Llandaff was resolved not to treat the matter seriously. She answered lightly,

"Something contagious? Are you, perhaps, coming down with the measles? Never mind, I had the disease at the proper early age; and so did Owen. So that is disposed of."

Katharine laughed slightly. She came back and stood again before her companion.

"It's worse than that, Aunt Kate. It's something you can't get over." She gave another little laugh that was rather dreary, and then added, "But I don't think it's catching."

"At your age one should get over anything. Very likely you think you're in love. There is nothing so probable in that case as complete recovery."

"It's worse than that," again said the girl. "I suppose I'm married."

Mrs. Llandaff rose to her feet. As she did so the girl shrank away from her.

"You poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Llandaff, in her most penetrating voice. She asked immediately, "What makes you suppose so?" and she could not help smiling now, although she was getting anxious.

"It doesn't seem as if it could really be true," began the girl. "I think all the time that it can't be possible. But it is. I forgot it a little since I've been at the shore. But Deacon Grove came down here yesterday. He wants to see me. I felt as if I couldn't see him. But I know I must. But I sha'n't go with him. Nothing can make me do that."

Her young face hardened so that a strange and faint and fleeting resemblance to her mother was visible.

"Who is Deacon Grove?"

Mrs. Llandaff did not smile any more. Still she tried not to show the anxiety which was deepening in her mind.

"He is—my husband."

The girl delivered the words clearly and slowly.

Mrs. Llandaff sat down now. She folded her hands. For the moment she hardly knew what to think or say. She wondered greatly that any girl who could look so resolute as this girl had just looked should have married unless she were willing.

"Since you feel this way, perhaps the man can be per-

suaded to get a bill. When I was young they used to talk in Feeding Hills about getting a bill. I believe the thing can be done with greater facility now than ever."

The woman spoke somewhat dully. She was trying to adjust her mind to this most unexpected complication.

"Grove?" she said, after a pause—"there used to be a young Marcellus Grove when I was a girl. He can't be the man. He married very early, too."

"I am his fourth wife."

Katharine made this statement as she had made the others.

Again Mrs. Llandaff rose to her feet. This time she seized her niece by both shoulders. She shook her slightly.

"Now tell me the whole story!" she cried. "Did Roxy do this thing? Yes, I am sure she did!"

"Yes," said Katharine. "It was mother. But I—oh, Aunt Kate, do you know what a will she has? How it presses down on you, and stifles you, and you have to do as she says? And I was so young, and father couldn't help me. I'm old enough now. I shall always be old now. And I shall never be happy, Aunt Kate. Just think! Never to expect to be happy! I'll tell you all about it. I want to tell you. It's killing me. And my mother did it—my own mother. If you had only been there—if you, Aunt Kate—"

The troubled, passionate voice ceased in a choking sound.

Mrs. Llandaff had drawn the girl into her arms and was holding her closely.

"Never mind," she said, "don't try to tell it now. And I forbid your saying you shall never be happy. And you're not old. Oh, you don't know what lovely things may happen to you."

"They can't happen. What good can happen to me with that horrid thing clogging me and always pulling me down? And I want to tell you now, this very minute."

She did not pause. Her swift voice plunged into her piteous story and did not stop until it was told.

At the end she said,

"And now I must see him. I have such dreadful, dreadful thoughts when I think of him."

She clung hard to the woman holding her.

"You need not see him," said Mrs. Llandaff's assured tones. "I'll see him myself."

Katharine lifted her head.

"Will you?" she said. "But if he insists?"

"Oh, leave him to me. Do you think I have lived to this age to be afraid of Marcellus Grove? No, indeed. Nor of a hundred like him."

Mrs. Llandaff spoke in a tone which she purposely made light. But she spoke the simple truth when she announced that she was not afraid of Marcellus Grove. What she was really afraid of was the effect all this anxious agony might have upon Katharine. She knew the girl's temperament well enough to be aware that an hour of suffering might leave upon her a mark deeper than that made by months of disturbance in some natures.

Katharine's whole attitude had undergone a change. She could almost believe that this woman could do miracles.

"But you know he thinks he is ill-used. He thinks he has a right—he—"

Mrs. Llandaff shrugged her shoulders.

"Leave him to me," she repeated. "It won't hurt him to be ill-used. And he ought to have known better. I understand it all. And your mother helped him. Now, Katharine, you are to lie down on my bed. Of course you don't think you will ever sleep again. But you will. I will send over to that café. I will arrange that Mr. Grove call here. You need not think anything more about it. Let me see— That girl who waits upon people with you—she may tell Mr. Grove to come here. If you think he has been wronged I will be very tender with him. You have no idea how tender I can be when I really try," smiling. "Now, obey me. Put yourself on my bed."

There was so much authority in Mrs. Llandaff's voice that her niece immediately obeyed, although she believed it to be very foolish for her to think of resting.

Nevertheless, in five minutes she was asleep, trusting in the hand that had taken hold of her affairs.

Mrs. Llandaff, instead of writing notes, as she had at first thought of doing, suddenly began to dress.

"That kind of people have to be up early," she was thinking.

So it was hardly seven o'clock when she was walking along the beach towards Mr. Jackson's restaurant.

She found the proprietor sauntering about the place in his shirt-sleeves with a pipe in his mouth. He was blustering at some of the girls who had appeared. He had just told them that they were enough to ruin his business, when, turning, he confronted the great public speaker in the doorway. In his embarrassed surprise he puffed a volume of smoke directly into her face before he could think to remove his pipe.

He grew red as she coughed, and he stammered that he hoped she would excuse him. Then he thrust his pipe into his waistcoat-pocket, from which receptacle it continued to emit a small column of smoke during the very brief interview which followed.

Mr. Jackson was informed that one of his girls—Mrs. Llandaff hardly knew whether to call her Katharine North, but did so—had unexpectedly left that morning.

That she would not return; that she, Mrs. Llandaff, would make good at that moment any pecuniary loss resulting from this sudden departure—which she did, to Mr. Jackson's perfect satisfaction, so that this gentleman always thereafter spoke of her as "a real A No. 1, and no mistake about it."

Then Mrs. Llandaff turned and looked about her for Joanna, whose name she did not know; but she knew her face, and that she was a friend of Katharine's.

Presently she saw her, and overwhelmed her by advancing directly to her. She held out her hand.

"I ought to know any one who is my niece's friend," she said in her warm manner and feeling what she said.

Joanna blushed and tried to speak, but only succeeded in gasping like a fish just flung on to the shore.

"I have taken Kate up to the Atlantic with me," went on the lady. "I come to ask if you would kindly inform Mr. Grove when he comes here that Mrs. Llandaff would like to see him at that hotel? You will?" as Joanna nodded. "I am so much obliged to you. Don't you get very tired here?" with genuine sympathy. "I know you must. I know what it is to labor. I was a working-girl myself once. I'm not likely to forget that. Good-by."

She pressed Joanna's toughened hand and walked away. The girl stood and gazed at her, her eyes sparkling in an unusual manner.

She turned back towards the kitchen, thinking that Kitty was lucky, after all. And she wondered what Mr. Grove would think. She was quite eager to give him the message.

He drew himself up, hardly knowing whether to be angry or pleased; and he hastened over to the Atlantic and sent up word, with quite a fine air, that Mrs. Llandaff had requested him to call.

But he had an uneasy fear lest he might be going to be reproved in some way. He said to himself, as he went up the stairs behind the servant, that he guessed he was not exactly the man to be reproved by any woman.

He put his hand to his necktie and to the pin in his shirt-bosom. Of course he pulled out his beard. Then he negligently stuck his thumb in his watch-chain.

Mrs. Llandaff was standing at a window. When she turned she recognized the man she had seen at the wharf the day before.

She had never been acquainted with the Grove family, but she had known of them as people in a place like Feeding Hills know about everybody within many miles.

As her eyes now flashed over her visitor her mind also flashed upon the manner in which she would receive him,

though she was obliged to make an effort which went much against the grain with her.

Still, she was used to making efforts of this kind, and had a natural ability in that direction.

She walked to meet him. Her figure had not grown too redundant with the years, consequently her movements had still a deal of freedom and grace.

She smiled at him as she extended her hand.

"It is like renewing my youth to meet any one from Feeding Hills," she said.

Mr. Grove felt flattered, though there seemed nothing in such words to flatter him.

He responded eagerly that Mrs. Llandaff did not appear to need anything that should renew her youth.

He was immensely pleased with this speech. He guessed he knew how to talk to women—even to this kind of a woman, and this was the society for which he was fitted. He had always known it.

Mr. Grove had also always known he was extremely susceptible. He knew it very well indeed now. Words never came to him in such a satisfactory way as they did during this call. But then, of course, he always had it in him—of course he knew that. Feeding Hills was such a narrow place for a man like him. Really it was.

For the first few moments Mr. Grove completely forgot Katharine. It was Mrs. Llandaff who recalled her to his mind by saying,

"I wanted so much to consult you about my niece. What an extremely unfortunate affair this is!"

Mr. Grove's brows contracted. He didn't want to remember Katharine.

"You cannot account for a girl's whims," went on Mrs. Llandaff adroitly, and she hastened to add, "Katharine seems very wilful. I don't think there is the slightest hope of turning her from her decision. We must make some arrangement. You must not be continually annoyed."

"That's a fact," he said emphatically. "Such a thing upsets a man horribly. And it makes him kind of ridiculous. I must see Kate."

He looked stubbornly at the woman sitting near him.

"Do you think that really necessary?" she asked. "Don't you fear that an interview may only be irritating to you?"

"I've got to see her," he responded. "That's what I came down to the shore for. I should feel rather small to go back and say I hadn't done what I set out for."

Certain of Deacon Grove's facial lines came out very distinctly and disagreeably just now.

Mrs. Llandaff, leaning back in an easy attitude and gazing pleasantly at him, was conscious of a strong and exceedingly unwomanly desire to have a whip in her hand and to let its lash go stingingly about the form near her. And yet, she tried to tell herself, he had his provocations. And what mere man would have desisted from paying his addresses to a girl he fancied, with a woman like Roxy to aid him? And what mere man would have believed Katharine's present attitude anything more than the result of a whim? Were not girls' minds full of whims? And couldn't they on the shortest notice fall into convulsions if they were thwarted? Mr. Grove was prepared for the convulsions. His heart had hardened greatly since that day, a few weeks ago, when his wife had so appealed to him and he had consented to befriend her against her mother.

When he thought of that moment he always told himself he had been confoundedly weak. He did not now recall that he had been also helpless. And he did not consider that he might be just as helpless again. He had not yet come to a realizing sense that the only way in which he could prevail upon Katharine to go with him was by binding her and carrying her off, after the manner of some ancient nations when in pursuit of wives.

Naturally he underestimated her power and overestimated his own. And he was not going to be weak the next

time he saw her. That would make all the difference in the world—this not being weak.

After a short silence Mrs. Llandaff inquired what he had set out for.

"Why, to take her home with me, of course. I guess I can make her see how things are this time."

There was a slight access of color in Mrs. Llandaff's face as she listened to him. She did not speak, and he went on:

"I just let her have her fling, you know, at first. I thought if she'd got some kind of a notion, why, I wouldn't be ugly about it. I'm going to be the best sort of a husband to her. Oh, things 'll be straight enough in a month's time. She'll see I mean well by her. I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mrs. Llandaff, for your kindness to my wife. I wish you'd come out and see us some time in Feeding Hills. I should be proud and happy to entertain you. I'd do it in the most tip-top way I knew, and be glad to."

As Mr. Grove talked an increasing self-satisfaction came to him. It was, as he thought, a first-class kind of a woman upon whom he was calling, and it was that variety of women who would be most likely to appreciate him.

He could not quite interpret the intent gaze which Mrs. Llandaff now fixed upon him for an instant.

She shook her head.

"Now let us talk like old friends," she said, in a confidential tone. "You must let me say that I don't think you fully understand the strength of Katharine's resolution. She doesn't wish to see you. She thinks it will only be disagreeable to you both. And she is sure she shall not go back with you."

Mr. Grove moved impatiently. He hoped he shouldn't get to disliking that girl who was making this row.

"Oh, well," he said, "I suppose she does think so now. But she's young enough to change her mind. Don't you see she's got to change it? You see, Mrs. Llandaff, she's married to me. And I want my wife at home."

In spite of her resolution as to her manner of treating

this man, Mrs. Llandaff now rose suddenly and with difficulty restrained a gesture of disgust.

Mr. Grove rose also. He tried to take an easy, gentlemanly attitude as he stood there.

Mrs. Llandaff was feeling his small, vain nature so keenly that even with her experience in veiling her emotions she could not look at him as she said,

"Perhaps it will do no good to prolong this kind of conversation. My niece does not wish to see you, Mr. Grove."

There was something in the speaker's voice now that was like the sting of that whip-lash which Mrs. Llandaff had a short time ago wished to use.

It was of no possible use to give this masculine mass of vanity and egotism any deferential flattery, she suddenly thought.

He stared at her in amazement. His face grew red. He had not heretofore deemed that Marcellus Grove could be so treated—and by women, too!

"Is Kate with you?" he asked presently.

"Yes."

"Then I guess that if you'll please tell her I want to see her, and that I'm going to stay round until I do see her, she'll understand. Yes, I'm going to stay."

He wanted to add, "if my business goes to thunder," but he checked himself in time.

"Let us be reasonable, Mr. Grove," suggested Mrs. Llandaff, giving him another smile which was wonderfully like a genuine smile.

He looked at her delightedly.

"I hope I'm reasonable," he responded. "That's just what I want to be. That's just what I want Kate to be—reasonable. Ask her to come here. I ain't going to give this thing up. I'm going to see her. She and I will have a good talk. We'll arrange everything in five minutes."

Mrs. Llandaff walked quickly out of the room. She knew that unless she did so her visitor would stand there and insist all day that Katharine be summoned.

She was not going to summon her, however. She felt a disagreeable sense of defeat. She had very soon discovered that, though Mr. Grove would like to remain for hours and have her defer gently to him and flatter his vanity, his little mind would still be fixed on the one point. And she tried to tell herself that it was perfectly natural he should do so. Why should she blame him for not seeing what was utterly beyond his powers of vision?

She walked down the long corridor and was returning, when, opposite the door of her inner apartment, she was detained by Katharine herself, who suddenly opened that door, seized her aunt's arm, and drew her within the room.

"He has come, hasn't he?" she asked.

She stood upright and spoke with a subdued ring in her voice.

"Yes."

"Is he going to persist in seeing me?"

"So he says. But he can't force you to see him, you know. I'm going back now to take a high stand with him and tell him that. He's one of those men who wants a woman to be sweet to him, while he never changes his mind."

"He'll stay here at the shore till he sees me, won't he?" asked Katharine.

"So he says."

"I thought so. Well, I'm not afraid to see him. Only I didn't want to"—her voice faltering on the last sentence. "Aunt Kate, I'm not quite so weak as I seem. I've been weak in a terrible emergency. That will be a lesson to me forever—forever. You see, Aunt Kate, rather than know he is here at the shore, I'll go directly."

The girl was holding her aunt's hand in hers and looking full in the woman's face, and there was something in her gaze that made Mrs. Llandaff's lips quiver uncontrollably. It was a strong gaze.

Though Katharine's voice had faltered, there was strength in her face.

"Oh, let him stay round, as he says," exclaimed Mrs.

Llandaff with a bitter lightness; "and when he has become unendurable I will get Owen to take him somewhere and thrash him. Owen would do a good deal for me."

Katharine smiled. She made a movement as if she would press nearer her companion, but she drew quickly back, having a sense that she must at this moment allow of no soft emotion.

"We will go away," suddenly remarked Mrs. Llandaff. "He will hardly follow us all over the country."

"No; you have engagements here. You like the air. Besides, Aunt Kate, I'm not going to be a coward all my life."

She walked towards the door leading into her aunt's sitting-room. She glanced back when she had her hand on the handle, and her eyes dwelt for an instant on those of the elder woman.

Then she opened the door and entered the room where Mr. Grove was standing, frowning and fuming.

He had not expected her to come quickly like this, and he was unable to speak for an instant. Then he rallied and went towards her with his hand out.

She placed hers in it for an instant.

"Now this is real good of you, Kitty. I knew you'd come to your senses, just give you a chance," he said hurriedly. "Now we'll have a little talk, and then we sh'll be all right. You know I wasn't going to be severe with you. I knew you were kind of sensitive, and wanted a light hand on the rein, you know. But we shall get along first-rate when we get to running. Girls have to have a little leeway given them, of course. You can't expect anything different."

Katharine would not sit. She withdrew her hand from Mr. Grove's grasp and stood before him.

"We don't need any talk," she said. "I came in because I didn't want you to stay here at the shore. I think you might better get a divorce, Mr. Grove. I should think you might easily enough. People seem to have no diffi-

culty in doing that. You've seen me now, and I hope you'll go home. I'm not going with you, and I shall not see you again. I thought, perhaps, it would be only fair to see you this once and let you know that I hadn't changed my mind concerning you, and that I never should change it. So you needn't make any plans about me. I'm sorry. Oh, you can't be nearly—not nearly as sorry as I am, for it all. Now I'm going back into the other room, Mr. Grove, and you needn't wait here any longer. There isn't anything more to say."

She turned as she finished speaking. The next instant she had shut the door behind her and was standing with Mrs. Llandaff in that lady's bedroom.

Her aunt was struck with something in the girl's bearing. There was a kind of power in it—something she did not forget, and which recurred to her again and again.

"Well," she said.

"I only told him I hadn't changed my mind," answered Katharine.

"Oh, you only told him that?" Mrs. Llandaff gazed at her niece. Katharine was rapidly casting off the husk that had enveloped and impeded her. But this birth into her real, underlying self had been so painful that the scars would throb with sudden agony long after she might believe they had become senseless.

"And what did he say?" inquired Mrs. Llandaff.

"Nothing, after I told him. I came away then."

Katharine sat down. She folded her hands and gazed at them. There had been no marriage-ring put on her finger. She was thinking now that she was thankful for that. She would have taken off the ring; but she was glad it had never been there, even for a moment.

Some one knocked on Mrs. Llandaff's sitting-room door.

The two women in the smaller apartment heard Mr. Grove stride to the door and fling it open. Then they heard him tramping along the corridor.

"We appear to be set at liberty," remarked Mrs. Llandaff

as the footsteps passed beyond hearing. "Let us make use of our freedom."

She drew the girl with her into the next room.

Young Llandaff rose from the chair where Mr. Grove had been sitting.

"I seem to have frightened some one away," he said, "I seem to have had the effect of the spider upon little Miss Muffet."

He had the appearance of addressing his step-mother. But his eyes turned in questioning surprise towards her companion. He knew that this was the tin-spoon girl. But she did not look the same to him. This face, suffused with some unknown emotion, was not the same as the face, depressed and controlled, which he had seen at the restaurant. But it was the one he had seen on the beach that morning.

The memory of Katharine as she had stood by the old wreck had been put in the background by the events which had happened later.

Now, as the young man bowed in response to Mrs. Llandaff's introduction, this memory flashed back upon him with a curious power. It was as if something that had been lying in wait for him had now sprung at him and grasped him.

The first involuntary movement of Llandaff's mind was to recoil from this thing which was springing at him—to recoil and to ward it off. He had that dim, prescient sense which often comes to us in critical moments that if he did not grapple with this mysterious something now, presently it would be beyond his power to fight it.

But alas! this prescient sense is often too vague to be anything but a disturbing element. It is not defined enough to be a distinct warning.

The eyes of the young man and young woman met in that quickly passing look of mutual inquiry which two strangers often give to each other at the first meeting.

"Who is your visitor, Mrs. Llandaff?" he asked. "He

was looking like the amiable, conventional meat-ax when he opened the door for me. I was afraid of my life as he stalked by me. And why, may I ask, did you keep him shut up here in your sitting-room? Is he a delegate from something or other, and does he want you to speak somewhere?"

Llandaff expanded his questions for the sake of increasing the length of his stay. He knew that he ought not to remain, since his step-mother was not alone.

Katharine looked at her aunt. She wondered if it would be incumbent upon her to explain, at intervals through her life, that there was such a person as Marcellus Grove, and the relation he bore to her.

She shrank from such an explanation; but, above all things, she wanted to be honest, and not to pretend to be what she was not.

Still, surely, a casual acquaintance had no claim to know anything about her.

"I must have a few secrets from you, Owen," answered Mrs. Llandaff in an easy tone. "What is a woman's life worth to her if she have no secrets?"

The young man said she needn't tell him; that he didn't want to take anything enjoyable from her life. He went on to say that he called to ask if he should order the horses for the usual time that night.

"No. Owen I may as well tell you at once that this child is my niece, and that I mean to keep her if I can. Perhaps you might as well shake hands with her. And now go away and amuse yourself."

As the door closed behind him Mrs. Llandaff turned, with a tender authority, towards the girl.

"Katharine," she said. "Don't let yourself become morbid. Don't think everybody must know about you. Really, your affairs are nobody's business but your own. What you have to do is to hold your tongue. I mean to release you from this imaginary bondage. For, after all, if you so will it, it is only imaginary."

Katharine looked up with relief.

"Do you think I may keep silent?" she asked eagerly. "I used to be afraid I was deceiving people because I didn't tell those waiter-girls that I was—that I had—"

Mrs. Llandaff smiled gayly.

"Don't be an idiot," she interrupted.

XII.

ON THE ROCKS

When Mrs. Llandaff told her niece not to be an idiot she was not, perhaps, aware of what a load she was removing from the girl's mind.

Katharine had been wondering whether she ought to inform people of that distressing incident in her life. It was a matter upon which she could not make up her mind; she could not see clearly. Now, however, she was relieved. Of course her aunt was right. She would know about such matters. Where Katharine had not thoroughly decided, she was singularly open to influence from one dear to her.

Now, as she stood there in the hotel-room, she almost thought that the worst burden of life had rolled from her. She was too young to be thus piteously weighted. She had had times, even at the café, when she had almost forgotten things. Now she would wholly forget them, and it would be as if they had never been.

Her heart swelled. She walked quietly to the window which overlooked the water. The glinting beauty of the bay smote her eyes. Tears suddenly came. They gathered and fell upon her face. But she did not know it. She was only aware of that exquisite sensation of relief and joy.

As she stood there two figures came within her vision. They were Llandaff and Miss Wyckham. They were going down the rocky path to the beach. She looked at them without thinking of them, and yet they left an impression upon her mind which she recalled afterwards.

Mrs. Llandaff had seated herself at the other side of the room. She had placed her head upon the back of the

chair and was watching the girl at the window. And her head was aching as she did so.

She was saying to herself,

"She shall be happy at any price. She shall be comforted at any price." Then, as an afterthought, she added, "And her mother ought to be shot."

Mrs. Llandaff in her philosophy of life did not include the discipline which wrings soul and spirit. Rather was it her philosophy to escape all discipline.

"Make sure of the present," she used to say.

And it was into her care that this girl was just now thrown.

"Katharine," she said after a long silence.

The girl turned.

"Bear in mind that I'm going to manage your affairs now; that is, those that you want to put from your own shoulders."

"Aunt Kate, you are—" began Katharine with tremulous voice and sparkling eyes.

She moved swiftly towards her aunt. She knelt down at her feet and leaned her arms on the woman's knees.

"Aunt Kate," she began again.

A voice outside said,

"I guess this is the room. It's the right number."

Then the door opened without any previous knocking, and Mrs. North came deliberately in. She was followed by her husband, who took off his hat and stood up against the door-frame.

Katharine rose from her knees. Every line of her slender figure assumed a defensive attitude.

Mrs. Llandaff rose also.

"You quite surprise me, Roxy," she said.

They all shook hands in a solemn manner.

"I got your letter," said Mrs. North, looking at her sister, "but I hadn't quite come round to answerin' of it. Then when the telegram came I thought we might's well start. Mr. North, he thought so."

Mr. North did not attempt to make any reply to this remark. He was gazing at his daughter.

Roxy had about her shoulders her best shawl. It was called a broché shawl. It had an extremely red centre. She unpinned this drapery now and folded it back from her thick neck. Her hands, in lisle-thread gloves, were clumsy. But she did not appear to want any assistance.

"Yes," she repeated, "Mr. North thought we'd better come."

Still no word from Mr. North.

"We seen Deacon Grove as we come up from the steamboat," announced Mrs. North. "He said," here she turned heavily towards her daughter, "that he'd jest seen you, Kate."

"He has," said Kate.

"He said," continued Mrs. North, as if the girl had not spoken, "that you was preposterous, Kate. Now, was you?"

At this stage in the dialogue Colburn North could not suppress a groan. Mrs. Llandaff put her handkerchief to her lips. She kept her eyes on her sister's face.

"Was you?" insisted Mrs. North.

"I really don't know," now answered Katharine.

"You know what the Bible says about husbands and wives, Kate?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Kate, with the old demeanor of respect.

Mrs. Llandaff took her handkerchief from her mouth.

"Roxy," she said, "don't go on talking that stuff. What did you come here for? You certainly have no more control over Kate. If she chooses to ask Mr. Grove's consent concerning any subject, she may. But you nor I have nothing to do in the matter. Do you see that? I wrote to you as a mere form. It would be pleasanter to have your consent. But we can do without it. Kate is going with me. Shall we talk about something else now? Did you have a pleasant trip down?"

Mrs. North turned to her husband.

"Colburn," she said, "I told you that my sister was jest the same."

"And you, Roxy, are much the same," responded Mrs. Llandaff, with more bitterness in her voice than her niece had believed could be there.

"Oh, Roxy doesn't change," suddenly asserted Mr. North.

"I thought we'd come down," again remarked Mrs. North, "'specially when we got the telegram. 'N' I thought we'd give our daughter one more chance to see the right path—I wanted my conscience clear."

Mr. North now looked full at Mrs. Llandaff.

"She wanted her conscience clear," he repeated.

Then he burst out into a boisterous laugh.

Katharine suddenly walked across the room to his side. She put her hand within his arm and hung upon it.

Her mother glanced at her. Mrs. North did not approve of being what she called "'fectionate."

She said that "folks had something better to do than to be round huggin' each other." She furthermore explained that she had never been 'fectionate, not even when she was young.

At this moment Katharine spoke. Even her mother was almost startled by the decision in her voice, which made it unlike, while yet it was like, the voice with which she had been familiar.

"I never shall see what you call the right path, mother," she said.

Mrs. North sat silent for a space after this.

Then, with her lisle-thread-impeded hands, she began to gather her broché shawl about her neck, although the perspiration was running down her face.

She was paler than usual. She turned towards her husband.

"Colburn," she said, "I guess we better be goin'."

Mr. North picked up his hat. Katharine stood perfectly still, watching them. She felt as if she should never see them again.

And for the first time in her life she pitied her mother. The woman looked old and benumbed, strangely pitiable to the younger one gazing at her.

The shawl did not respond to the efforts directed towards it. It continued to slip back, down the broad shoulders upon which it belonged.

Mrs. North's hands dropped clumsily in her lap. Perhaps this moment brought with it the nearest approach to mental agony she had ever known. There was the child she had nursed through croup, whose taste in the matter of food she had consistently consulted, whom she had married to a likely, forehanded man—there she was standing there and defying her. And she, Mrs. North, could not help herself. The massive, persistent sluggishness which had hitherto served its possessor so well was powerless now.

Not until this moment did Roxy North take into her mind the full sense of the fact that her daughter was now a woman. And a woman against whose will it was useless for her to struggle.

That slender shape standing there held something stronger than she. She could not understand it. The mere effort to understand confused her.

As her mother's hands fell upon her lap, Katharine moved quickly forward to her mother's side. She stooped over her and drew the shawl into place. She arranged the chain shawl-pins just as her mother always arranged them. She did it deftly and gently, but without any tenderness in her touch or in her heart.

Mrs. North looked up at the girl.

"I'm much obliged to ye," she said.

She sat still a moment. She had, as she sat there, an indescribable appearance as if she could not move—as if she must go right on sitting in that chair. She did not continue to look at Katharine. Her eyes fixed themselves on the floor. She seemed to have forgotten that she had just said that they must be going.

"Mother," said Katharine, "I'm sorry."

The voice that uttered these words was very solemn.

"I guess there ain't no need to talk any more," replied Mrs. North.

Then she turned towards her husband and repeated her former remark about going.

Mr. North put on his hat with a desperate gesture. Then, remembering where he was, he removed it with the same kind of a gesture. He dropped the hat on a chair, walked towards Katharine, and took her in his arms. He held her for an instant, kissed her, then he turned and said in a loud voice,

"Roxy, I'm ready to go right away."

His wife rose. She did not glance towards her daughter or her sister as she walked to the door, and she passed out of the room without glancing.

The door closed upon them. Katharine remained standing where her father had left her.

She was silent; Mrs. Llandaff respected the silence.

The girl's face was so pale that the woman watched her closely.

Suddenly Katharine turned and took her hat from a table near her.

"Aunt Kate," she said, "I think I will go down to the beach. I feel some way as if there wasn't air enough to breathe in this room."

"Yes, go," said Mrs. Llandaff. Katharine hurried out of the hotel and down the hill. At this hour there were very few people visible; and those few were those who come to the shore for the day, and who, as a matter of duty, walk about continually, or sit and throw pebbles into the water. This kind of human being is always more or less prevalent here from the Fourth of July to the first of September.

But Katharine did not notice any one.

She went straight among the rocks and sat down in the shelter of them. She took off her hat and leaned her head back. She was glad she had come out. The rushing and sucking of the water about her confused her somewhat, and she was thankful for that. She did not want to think, and she could not seem to do so in this place.

Her face, unshaded by her hat, was sharply defined against

the conglomerate rock, which here was of a dull, mixed red.

Miss Wyckham had, in contradiction to her usual custom, walked out at this hour of the day. The reason of her doing so was because Llandaff had gone fishing, and she expected him to return at any time now. He would leave his sail-boat in this cove and come up to the beach in a dory. There was the dory anchored a few rods out, and there also was the little white sail-boat coming in gayly, its canvas stretched taut in the wind.

Standing there close to the water's edge, Miss Wyckham, not to seem to watch too closely for that boat's arrival, turned and glanced over the rocks.

Her wandering eyes paused an instant on Katharine's figure. She could not see the expression of the face, but something in the attitude appealed to her sympathy.

And yet, apparently, this was only a girl reclining on the rocks and watching the tide come in.

When Llandaff had leaped out of his dory and had drawn it up above high-water mark, Miss Wyckham said,

"Owen, do you see that girl up there?"

The young man turned to look.

"Yes," he said, in the tone which does not invite further conversation on the subject.

Miss Wyckham was thinking that it was pleasant to say "Owen" rather than "Mr. Llandaff." She thought she would say it again as soon as there was opportunity.

"Who is she?"

"Some one Mrs. Llandaff knows."

"Is she one of our set?"

Llandaff could not help smiling slightly.

"I should say not," he answered with noticeable emphasis.

Miss Wyckham lifted her eyebrows as she glanced at him. Then she lowered her voice to its gentlest cadence as she inquired,

"Do you know her, Owen!" He did not appear to notice the cadence or the glance as he answered,

"Mrs. Llandaff introduced me. The extent of conversation on my part has been to say I hoped she liked the shore. Why don't you ask about my luck fishing?"

Presently the two climbed up the hill.

With every step Llandaff took, the resolution to return directly became stronger. And yet he did not, even in his own mind, acknowledge what was the cause of this resolution.

Afterwards, in thinking over that time as calmly as the sudden "possession," as he always called it, would allow him to do, he never could tell in what manner he got away from the hotel to which he accompanied Miss Wyckham.

But he did get away. He went straight to his dory and bent over it, examining it as if he feared that he had left his most precious treasure there.

Then he stood up. His eyes sought that place on the rocks. Yes, she was there.

He faced round the other way. He took off his hat and passed his hand over his face.

It seemed to him that he had never felt anything so keen as that poignant sympathy. And yet he could not tell why there should have been anything to appeal to him thus.

"She is suffering," he thought. He was naturally warm-hearted and sympathetic in a superficial kind of way which drew people to him, and which had not yet been any great drain upon him. But he was dimly aware now that hitherto his sympathy had been so impersonal as to be of small account—in his own estimation.

He looked again at the rock. He tried to persuade himself that the tide would soon surround it, and that if he did not warn that girl—but no; he knew there was not the slightest danger from the tide. The girl was just as safe as if she were up at the hotel.

Not having decided anything, he gave up trying to decide, and began leaping from one point to another of the ledge, until he stood at Katharine's right and a little above her.

From this point he contemplated with deep interest the

whole outline of Nantasket Beach as it stretched away at his left.

Katharine had absently heard footsteps, but the sound had made no impression upon her. People were always walking about here. No one would disturb her. After a while this suffering would abate. After a while she would cease to think of her father and mother in this way. She had to do as she had done. She had to do it. So, over and over, in painful iteration, went the words in her mind. Before her her father's face was placed, as if it were a picture that would never be removed.

In spite of her reiteration that this pain would abate, being young she was positive that it would not. What she really believed was that she should always be miserable.

From the very circumstances this must be so.

Llandaff sprang down near where she sat. She moved in a startled way. He stepped still further down until he stood below her. He took off his hat and looked up at her.

"Do forgive me," he said impetuously.

It was a moment before he went on. In that moment his eyes were on her face deprecatingly.

"I know precisely how rude I am," he continued. "You want to be by yourself. When I came in in my boat and saw you here, I had a feeling as if you were suffering. Oh, I know you can't forgive me. But do try, won't you. Mrs. Llandaff and I are such friends, besides being connections, you know, that I tried to think that you and I, Miss North, were not strangers, and that I—that you—" He paused, smiling in the most genial, helpful way, up at the face looking down at him.

He did not care if his words did sound somewhat confused. He was sure she would understand them.

It was difficult to tell from her countenance whether she understood them or not.

She was now studying his face with an unconscious intentness that reminded him of the gaze he had received from a child.

"I know how wrong it was for me to intrude," he repeated his apology again.

She withdrew her eyes from him and directed them towards the water.

"Yes," she said, "it must have been wrong, for we are hardly acquaintances."

"You mean, then, that I must go away immediately?"

"No, I didn't mean that. You seem so—so friendly."

"Friendly!" he repeated. He added quickly, "Yes, I am. I don't know why it should seem as if you needed a friend and help."

"I don't know why, either. I don't, in the least. I have my Aunt Kate, and"—in pursuance of her old conviction—"I have myself. I really don't need anything else, you see."

"Of course not," his face breaking again into a smile. "You are fully equipped for the battle of life. But it will not harm you if my attitude of mind should not be actually hostile to you, Miss North?"

Katharine had never heard any one talk like this before. In thinking of this way of using words she was confused by the presence of the impulse in her mind to tell Mr. Llandaff that he ought not to call her Miss North. This impulse was restrained, however, by the recollection of her aunt's advice, and she did not wish to tell. It would be, as she expressed it to herself, "a great trial," to explain this to any one. She wished that she did not have that fear, far down in her consciousness, that she was deceiving people. She hoped she should at last become so hardened that that fear would leave her.

Suddenly he began,

"When I saw you here I wanted to come and speak to you. I even tried to think the tide would surround this rock—you see how fast the water comes in now—and I could make the excuse that I must tell you of your danger. But the only danger is that the spray will wet your hat"—he lifted her hat from the place where it lay and deposited

it in a more sheltered spot—" and that, eventually, it will wet you also."

She did not quite understand him. He knew very well that she did not. She did not attach any particular significance to his being with her, or to his words, any more than if he had been a woman who had come to her.

She smiled down at him.

" You were very kind to spend all that thought upon me," she said.

" I know it," he answered quickly. " You have no idea what a feeling of conscious goodness I now experience. Will you permit me to sit down ?"

She laughed.

" I never had a feeling of conscious goodness in my life. It must be delightful. It is conscious wickedness that oppresses me."

" I should have known that," he said; " your face shows that. Do you know, these depraved natures always have just your kind of face, Miss North."

" Do they ?"

" Certainly. I knew it the moment I saw you," Llandaff wondered why his spirits were rising so. " But there is always a great deal of hope when a woman has a consciousness of being wicked. Cling to that, Miss North. Keep right on feeling wicked. It may be your only hope of reform."

He gazed delightedly at her. Some kind of ethereal joy was mounting to his head, and from there diffusing itself subtly through him. He was not a man entirely ignorant of experience in various phases of life, but just this experience he had not known.

Of course it was easily enough explained. Different people affected one differently. And this girl was extremely different. She was so different that Llandaff thought it would require a long time to study her sufficiently to enable him to classify her.

Now he knew with accuracy all about Miss Wyckham—

just what she would say and do on all possible occasions. She would always say and do the absolutely correct thing. He had been grateful for this fact.

At this moment, however, a sudden sense of flatness came to him at the recollection of this perfection on the part of his betrothed. He preferred just now to forget Miss Wyckham.

Katharine looked off at the water again.

"It's very depressing to feel wicked all the time," she remarked.

"No matter, if the feeling leads to repentance. Simple remorse won't do, Miss North."

Katharine wished that he would not say Miss North so often, although the words gave her a certain pleasure.

His face changed a little as she now said,

"Sometimes I almost wish my conscience was seared, Mr. Landaff." Then, meeting his eyes, which were laughing, she laughed also. She laughed again at the thought that she should feel so much at home with "the public speaker's young man," as Joanna Damon called this person sitting on the rock almost at her feet.

"There are certainly only two things absolutely desirable in this world," said Llandaff, with an air of settling all matters. "Shall I tell you what they are?"

"Oh, yes," eagerly bending forward a little and looking intently at him.

"They are: a perfectly hardened conscience or a perfectly clear one," was the reply.

"Yes, yes," she responded. "Still, I would rather suffer than to have the first."

She sank back again into her former position.

The water came foaming in at the chasm below them, and thundered up the full length of the opening, pounding at last against the further wall, whence it sent up white spray.

The sound soothed Katharine. She wanted to close her eyes and let the rush and roar envelop her consciousness. But she kept her eyes fixed on the water out by Seal Ledge, which was now but a line of always changing foam.

Llandaff also kept his position as long as he dared to do so. But he could not continue to intrude.

Up at the hotel, Miss Wyckham had seated herself on the veranda. After a few moments she went to her own room. In the most casual manner she walked to her window.

Yes. Owen had gone down there. He was talking with that girl. Owen was so very democratic. But then, men were always so much more democratic than women, anyway. It was well enough for men to be so. And she must notice that girl. She wondered if she were going to stay with Mrs. Llandaff; was she Mrs. Llandaff's amanuensis, or something of that sort? When she and Owen were married Miss Wyckham thought that it would be just as well if they did not see so much of Mrs. Llandaff; that lady had some extreme notions, though of course she was so brilliant and so— There was Owen just coming up now. And that girl was with him.

Miss Wyckham, sitting by the window, leaned her arms upon its shelf and gave herself up to uninterrupted watching of the two who were slowly making their way over the ledge. She only withdrew when it became likely that Llandaff might see her. But from a position further within the room she saw him look up in her direction, and she flushed a little as she saw this look. But her regards were fixed on Katharine. She studied her figure, her movements, with an interest that surprised her afterwards, and that also humiliated her. Why should she spend any time watching a girl who was not in her set?

She turned and moved with smooth haste into the hall and down the stairs. She even stopped to speak to a friend, without any apparent hurry, but her calculations were exact, and they brought her out upon the seaward piazza at the precise moment when Llandaff and Katharine were within a few yards of the steps.

Miss Wyckham strolled negligently forward. She looked at Llandaff, though upon her mind there was projected only the picture of Llandaff's companion.

Katharine was thinking that it was wonderful how beautifully and yet how simply a woman may dress. She was admiring Miss Wyckham enthusiastically. And that lady, not being in the least aware of the reason, was all at once conscious of a cold sinking of the heart. But she smiled graciously at Llandaff, and tentatively and gently at Katharine, who hastened forward and up to her aunt's room.

"She seems a nice little thing," remarked Miss Wyckham.

"Yes," said Llandaff. "And now that one sees her fully, one doesn't feel so sorry for her. I suppose it was her attitude down there."

"I suppose it was. Has she anything to say for herself?"

Llandaff seemed to consider.

"I don't think she did have much to say. But then I was very brilliant, and that seemed sufficient."

"Perhaps, then, she is one of those fortunate mortals who are the cause of brilliancy in others."

"Perhaps."

Llandaff placed a chair for Miss Wyckham, for he saw she was going to remain for a while. He drew another seat near for himself.

"Let me continue the subject," he said. "We certainly cannot find anything more interesting. I find the young lady is Mrs. Llandaff's niece. Or did I tell you that?"

Miss Wyckham's eyes suddenly fell.

"No, you didn't tell me that. You only said she was not in our set."

"Poor wretch that she is!" exclaimed Llandaff.

"Owen," said the lady in a very low voice.

"Yes."

"Don't let us be disagreeable."

"As if you could be that!"

In the short silence which followed the young man's face seemed to stiffen in some indescribable way. And in that silence some very sharply pointed thoughts stabbed themselves into his consciousness.

He sat still, looking down into his straw hat, which he held in his hand.

Miss Wyckham furtively glanced at the brown face near her. At that instant it was a strongly bitter face that she saw. The brows looked blacker and heavier than ever before.

She withdrew her eyes with a sense of something like terror. At that instant she made up her mind thoroughly once for all that really Llandaff was not entirely like the rest of the lawn-tennis young men; that the difference extended further even than the eyebrows.

XIII.

NOT IN SYMPATHY

When Mrs. North and her husband left the hotel the woman made her way slowly down the steps and out into the road which led to the beach. The sun came hotly on her, but she did not feel it. Her shawl was drawn closely about her, but she did not think of loosening it. Her large, square face was red, and it had drops of perspiration upon it. These drops gradually rolled down and fell in little splashes on her shawl and her lisle-thread gloves.

Mr. North walked somewhat behind her, with his hat on the back of his head, which was bent forward. He was indefinitely conscious of the dark, bulky form in advance of him, and he had a dreadful feeling that this bulk had forever blotted out his life's sunshine.

And again there came to him the thought of that man in the other part of the town who had been found dead, swinging from a rope in his barn.

The thought of this man became so strong and so gruesomely attractive that Mr. North lifted his head and tried to look about him. He tried to look at the coast and the bay. But they did not interest him in the least. Nothing interested him.

There was his wife moving steadily on ahead of him. Some suggestions came into his head about her. Did he really hate her? He shuddered strongly. What if she should fall down in a fit and die before his eyes?

But everything was too late now. He had been a coward. He had not risen and said such a thing should not be.

He had always been afraid of that woman walking ahead

of him. And who loves what he is afraid of? No, he had never loved her. Never for an instant. But he had once thought she was handsome and would make him an excellent wife. And she had certainly fulfilled his expectations.

Now he felt like grinding his teeth as he looked at her.

He recalled the sensitive, refined face of the woman whose presence he had just left. He fancied himself meeting the glance of her eyes, and again he shuddered. But what business had a middle-aged man, one of the selectmen of Feeding Hills, Roxy's husband, with any such fancies?

Mrs. North had reached the turn in the road. This turn led to the beach. Coaches and barges were thundering along the highway towards the landing. Another boat would soon be due. The dust whirled about the two afoot there.

Mrs. North paused for Colburn to come up.

"Do you think we c'n ketch the steamboat?"

As she put this inquiry, her husband with difficulty forced his eyes to rest upon her.

Instead of answering, he said with ill-suppressed savageness,

"Why don't you unfasten that shawl, Roxy?"

Then she asked again, and in the same tone,

"Do you think we c'n ketch the steamboat?"

"Lots of time. It hasn't got in yet." After a moment's struggle with himself, Mr. North went on, "Now we're here, don't you want to look round a little, and have some ice-cream or something?"

"I guess we better go right back," she answered. "I never did think I sh'd care for the sea-shore."

"All right. It's all the same to me. Hadn't we better take one of these barges? They're going right to the wharf."

"I c'n walk well enough." Mrs. North started on again. And again her husband followed a few feet behind her.

The man's mind reverted to the form dangling from that rope in the solitary barn. He wondered what kind of a wife that person had had. He wondered if she were a large woman, and if she had ever persisted in wearing a thick shawl on a hot summer day.

Colburn North had a feeling just now as if his endurance were stretched to the uttermost, and that if it should suddenly snap he should not be responsible for what happened.

The walk seemed interminable. But presently he forgot all about the heat. He plodded on almost as dully as did his wife.

The boat was at the wharf and had disgorged its passengers when the two turned on to the long planking. It was so hot that no one, not even an excursionist, was shooting in the little gallery. And no one was buying chocolate cakes or tonic beer.

Mrs. North marched steadily to the boat. She sat down in the first seat she reached on the deck. The sun streamed upon the place, but she did not notice it.

Mr. North hesitated an instant; then he sat down a few seats away, taking his favorite attitude by thrusting his feet out to the full length of his legs and putting his hands in his pockets.

No one else was near. Everybody who came on the boat sought the shade.

A man walked to the door of the saloon and looked frowningly out. It was Deacon Grove, and he started a little as he saw the two sitting there, although he knew they had come to the shore that day.

"Hullo, North," he said. "Why in the world don't you come in the shade? For my part, I don't like being baked."

Mrs. North looked up and bowed with careful recognition.

In a moment she rose and walked into the saloon. Mr. North rose and followed, something as a spaniel might have

done. He appeared to have lost, for the time at least, all his hectoring, superficial manner.

Mr. Grove drew a camp-chair up in front of Mrs. North.

"Well, did you see her?" he asked.

Mr. North had sat down and immediately resumed the position which he had been obliged to abandon while walking from one place to another.

His eyes fastened themselves upon the man who had married Katharine, and who was now addressing Mrs. North.

"Yes, we seen her," replied the woman.

"Is there any chance?" eagerly from Deacon Grove.

Mrs. North shook her head. "She's real set. I hadn't no idea of her bein' so set."

She folded her hands and gazed at them.

There was something inexpressibly desolate in Roxy's face and attitude. But Mr. Grove did not see it. He was absorbed in his own thoughts and feelings. And he was angry with this mother who had, as he would have said, encouraged him and made the match.

"Yes," repeated Mrs. North after her manner, "I hadn't no idea that Kate 'd ever be so set."

She rearranged her hands. Mr. Grove slapped his hand down on his knee.

"It's been a piece of the devil's work from beginning to end," he said, as violently as he dared to speak in such a place. "And you're to blame for it, Mrs. North. What 'd I know about how she felt? What—" here the speaker glanced aside and caught Mr. North's eyes on him. There was something so very disagreeable in those eyes that Mr. Grove did not finish his sentence. He began again:

"She said something to me about a divorce. But that's one thing I never 'll consent to 's long's there's the breath of life in me. I ain't never got divorced yet, and I ain't never going to."

Mr. Grove slapped his knee again.

Mr. North, who had been gazing at him, suddenly withdrew his eyes as he said,

"Your wives have been so considerate as to die, Grove."

"What do you mean by that?" threateningly.

"Nothing."

"All right."

Mrs. North did not seem to think it necessary to look at her husband at all. She kept her attention fixed upon her son-in-law.

At last she spoke.

"That's the way I always looked at it. I ain't no hand for divorces. Katharine's got to bear it. 'Tain't pleasant for any of us. 'N' she's got to bear it."

As she spoke the woman was conscious that her mixture of feeling was resolving into a smouldering resentment. She did not know how to suffer. She never had suffered, save with a toothache or some other pain of the body.

"Yes, she's got to bear it," with monotonous repetition.

"Roxy," said her husband's voice, "would you just as lief stop talking?"

Deacon Grove gave a short laugh and rose to his feet, pushing the camp-chair back with a swift motion.

He went outside and leaned on the boat's rail.

He was joined almost immediately by Mr. North, who leaned beside him.

There was something curious about Mr. North's face since he had bidden good-by to his daughter within the hour.

"I don't suppose you really meant what you just said about a divorce, Grove, did you?" he asked.

"You may be mighty sure I did mean it," was the answer.

Mr. North knew his companion well enough to know how pig-headed he was.

"It would be easy, you know," went on North in a very calm way—"perfectly easy under the circumstances, if you were willing. I'll look into the matter a little. I'll ask Squire Ladd."

"No, you needn't do any such thing."

As he heard these words Mr. North drew nearer and

turned to look full in the man's face. His look was persistent, and Grove was obliged to meet it. As he met it he could not help shrinking somewhat. But he held up his head directly and laughed.

"Women don't twist me round their little fingers; now I tell you they don't," he said.

He rested one hand on his hip, and he drew out his moustache with the other.

Mr. North knew what this attitude meant. He glanced about him immediately. He saw that a girl in a blue sailor suit, with flaring silk neck-tie, had come to the saloon-door, and was standing there, pressing the handle of her parasol to her chin with a great appearance of unconsciousness.

Deacon Grove curled up the other side of his moustache.

Mr. North's face contracted in a sneer that was not good to see. He glanced down at the water, and he looked at the railing as if he were asking himself if he could throw that man over.

Then he wheeled round and, hurrying into the saloon, he sat down by his wife, who did not notice his appearance in any way. She was sitting there, contemplating her gloves.

After a while there was a slow heaving and trembling of the boat. A few men came racing down the wharf and leaped on board. The craft at last slewed round, after having made a show of starting back for Boston stern-foremost.

The sunlight was so dazzling on the water that almost everybody turned away from it. A steady wind from the land made all the ribbons and streamers on the girls who stood on deck in the shade blow out seaward. Everybody said to everybody else, "How hot it is! I haven't suffered so much before this season."

And the older folks prophesied thunder-showers before midnight. Even those youths with russet shoes and loose, light trousers turned up at the bottom seemed to have lost the faint hint of animation they sometimes possessed.

There were two or three people who had never been down

the harbor, who had not been to Hull before, who were trying to look at the objects of interest. They stared at the trim little fort; they asked dreadful questions of those who had volunteered information, but they did not listen when they replied. It was too hot. Who cared anything about Fort Independence, anyway?

When the city began to show more and more plainly, its roofs sloping almost symmetrically in this perspective from the State House dome, Mr. North told his wife she might as well come down to the gangway; they wouldn't have any time to lose when they did get there, if they wanted to fetch up home that night.

Deacon Grove was evidently moved by the same thoughts, for he was waiting for the plank to be thrown out.

The two men found themselves standing side by side in the group of those who are always in a hurry, and who always stand at the outlets of public conveyances ready to dart forward.

"I say, Grove," said Mr. North, speaking more slowly than was his custom, and with his lips near to the other man's face—"I say, I don't suppose you really meant what you said about a divorce. Kitty is so young, and she's set; and you know you'll be wanting another wife, anyway. You'll reconsider, eh?"

The deacon turned sharply. "No, I sha'n't reconsider, either. I shouldn't ask anything better than a chance to grind her obstinate little face, even if I cut my own nose off doing it. Don't you think I've got any feelings? Do you think I like to cut this kind of a figure? Tell me that."

Mr. North drew back somewhat. He passed his hand for an instant across his eyes. It seemed to him that his sight for the time was wrong; that there was a red light upon everything. And his thoughts, dwelling persistently upon his daughter, all at once became a confused jumble.

It was but a moment later that Mr. Grove, getting on the

wharf, and possibly being absorbed in the resolve to grind an obstinate little face, did not sufficiently defend himself from the jostling of the crowd.

He fell into the water. And he screamed so shrilly as he fell that people thought it was a woman, and dashed, and crowded, and shouted, and stared, and cried out, "Where? Where?"

"Can he swim?" asked some one close to Mr. North. "Do you know anything about him? I saw you two talking."

"No, he can't swim. He was always afraid to learn. He'll drown, to a dead certainty."

Having spoken thus, Mr. North pushed two or three men aside. He pulled off his coat, and, turning, handed it to his wife, who was behind him, wedged helplessly. He handed her his hat also.

Then he appeared to hesitate for the space of a breath. While he hesitated his wife said,

"Colburn, mebbe you'll have the cramp."

"That's so. Likely 's not I shall," he responded.

He jumped directly into the water. He had been an excellent swimmer since he was a boy.

It was a very hot day, and a plunge was really refreshing. He had no difficulty in seizing Deacon Grove as he came up gasping. And he succeeded in preventing the deacon from throttling him in his eagerness to be saved.

Owing to this little incident, this group of three did not arrive in Feeding Hills that night. They spent the hours of darkness in a hotel, while the wet clothes were drying. And Mrs. North wondered audibly a great many times whether the boy they had conditionally engaged would really milk their cows and do the various other "chores."

She did not mention Katharine again. And from that time forward the girl's name was rarely spoken by her father or mother. But the father, as he went about his farm, used to think a great many things. He fell to recalling with a morbid persistency that story of what Queen Mary

said, that when she was dead they might find the name Calais written on her heart.

He thought his child's name was written upon his heart.

He was frightened sometimes by the way he continued to feel towards his wife. He came systematically to avoid looking at her. He wondered if his brain were becoming affected. He knew there was not a more level-headed man in all the town. And yet he found each day that it was more difficult than the day before to look at that woman who was going to be his companion as long as they both should live.

As long as they both should live. He caught himself repeating that phrase as he rubbed down his horse or hoed his potatoes. It was a terrible phrase.

He would stop and lean on his hoe and gaze towards the house. Should he never see his little girl come out of the back door and run across the yard to the garden where he was at work?

He shut his eyes and saw her. But when he opened them it was Roxy who was making her way towards him over the thick white clover that grew in one part of the yard.

She came calmly on, stopping only when she reached the wall. She put her hands on the large flat stone near the little gate.

"Ain't you 'fraid you'll git that ketch in your back if you hoe so long, Colburn?" she asked.

He raised his eyes as far as her hands. He saw the ring on her left hand.

"No, I guess not," he answered.

He grasped the hoe, but he did not lift it.

"Young Saunders has jest stopped with that flour," she remarked.

There was a silence for so long that North made an effort and expressed a hope that it would turn out to be a good barrel.

"He said," went on Mrs. North, as if she had not paused

in her speech, "that Deacon Grove had really come down with some kind of a fever now, and they'd had two doctors —one from the west part—'n' they don't know whether he'll weather it or not. They all say 'twas on account of his fallin' into the water that time, 'n' he so hot 'n' sweaty 'n' not being able to take off his clo'es till he'd ridden to that hotel. They say he'd ought to have walked. If he'd walked they say he'd kept kinder limbered up."

Mr. North listened to his wife, with his chin resting on his hand, which held the top of the hoe-handle.

It was not yet a week since they had been to the shore. He had heard that Deacon Grove had not been well.

North now looked again at the ring on his wife's hand.

"If he's going to die anyway," he said in a harsh voice, "I don't see's I need to have been at the trouble of pulling him out."

"I don't like to hear you talk that way," she said. "It sounds jest as if you wa'n't a church-member."

"Oh, I'm a church-member fast enough," was the response.

"I don't like to hear you talk that way," she repeated. "I didn't know but you'd feel like harnessing 'n' going over to inquire. You know he's our son-in-law."

"Yes, I know he is."

As he said this the man's savage eyes flashed for an instant over his wife's face.

Roxy did not know why it was, but something in that look made this worn, masculine face resemble Katharine's when it had been indignant and fiery.

"I didn't know but you might feel like harnessing," said Roxy.

"You may have the horse if you want to go," now said her husband. "Shall I harness right away?"

"But I'm afraid to drive since Black Jim run that time. I guess you'll have to go 'n' drive, Colburn."

"I'll get the Doane boy to drive."

"That Doane boy's jest as ca'less as he c'n be."

Mr. North stood with his lips shut tight for a brief space, during which Mrs. North waited patiently, leaning on the rock.

Her husband put his hoe over his shoulder and started for the barn.

Roxy went into the house and began to get ready to go. She brushed her thin wisps of hair. She put a little soap and water on the front and spatted it with her hands so that no stray hair should escape as she drove in the wind to inquire after the welfare of Marcellus Grove.

She had her second-best black wool gown on and securely fastened round her ample waist, when her husband came to the screen-door.

"Jest whisk your hat round and git the flies off 'fore you touch the latch," she said—"they do come in so."

"I'll wait outside," he answered.

"But ain't you goin' to comb your hair, nor nothing?"

"No. I sha'n't stop at Grove's. I'll leave you there while I go on to the west part. And I'll call for you in about an hour."

Roxy said no more until the two were in the covered wagon and moving along the white road where the dust had covered all the bayberry bushes and the burdock shrubs, and where it came up in puffs every time the horse lifted his foot.

Then she said,

"I guess, Colburn, you might's well stop at Mr. Grove's with me."

Mr. North reached forward with a quick motion and took the whip from its socket. He cracked it violently; the horse started; the dust flew up blindingly. The man put back the whip. He turned squarely round towards his wife.

"No," he said, "I sha'n't stop."

There came into his mind with such force that he could hardly refrain from repeating them aloud, these words,

"As long as they both should live."

If he could not find any way to get rid of those words, he was quite certain he should really go crazy.

And what did this open rebellion against his wife mean? He must be changing somehow.

Mrs. North's face preserved its usual appearance. She remarked that there couldn't nothing grow 'less it rained pretty soon. And presently she suggested again that Colburn 'd better stop and jest inquire.

"If you say that again," said North, "I shall tell you something you won't want to hear."

Perhaps Roxy had never come so near being nervously startled in her life. And of course she instantly determined that she would know what it was she should not want to hear.

"Seems to me you're kinder queer to-day, ain't you, Colburn?" she asked. "Do you think that meat-pie was too rich? I did get in more lard into the crust than I meant to."

"I don't feel as if I was suffering from the over-richness of anything," said Mr. North emphatically.

"I did git in more lard'n I meant to," again confessed the woman.

She was conscious of a smouldering sort of excitement which was growing in strength.

"It 'll look dretfully if you don't go in 'n' inquire about Deacon Grove," she said.

"Can't help that."

"P'rhaps you'll change your mind 'fore we git there."

"No, I sha'n't."

Mrs. North spread out her shawl more smoothly on her lap. She was angry that she should experience so much curiosity. And she hated anything that moved her in any way. It was incredible that Colburn should hold out against her wishes. And how her daughter had defied her!

Were people going to begin now to do as she didn't wish them to do?

There was certainly something different from ordinary

about her husband—different even from what he had been since Katharine's marriage.

As for Mr. North, he was experiencing for a fleeting moment that exhilaration which the open breaking-out of an insurrection will sometimes cause in the participants. But he knew very well that it was not in him to hold out. Years of submission went for too much.

Mrs. North was now convinced that her husband was not going to stop at the deacon's.

She looked intently at him to see if his face showed any signs of indigestion.

"I certainly do think the pie-crust was too rich," she remarked.

Her companion made a movement as if he would seize the whip again, but he sank back on the seat without having touched it.

The horse was walking. It was still almost a mile to their destination. But Roxy's mind could not hurry. And she must find out what it was she wouldn't want to know. She became rather bewildered. Her mind was fumbling after some means. Naturally, she could only make another remark about "how dretfully it would look if Colburn went right by and didn't stop, and the deacon connected to them as he was and layin' there in a fever and mebbe not goin' to git up."

"If he don't get up it 'll be a mighty good thing," suddenly and sharply said Mr. North.

"Colburn! I'm surprised!"

"Oh, well, you may go right on being surprised," said North. His eyes, extremely bright with the agitation upon him, again flashed over his wife, and again reminded her painfully of Katharine, although the girl's eyes were really like those of her Aunt Kate.

"I know what you're driving at," continued Mr. North. "You won't be half so comfortable after you know. But perhaps it's just as well that you needn't always be comfortable. If Grove is sick a dozen years I guess I sha'n't

go to see him. He's a narrow-minded, vain, sneaking old skunk—that's about the size of Marcellus Grove; though he knows how to take off his hat when he sees a girl. And women like him—some of them; most women don't know anything."

"I don't see why you can't stop 'n' inquire, anyway."

"Don't you? All right, I sha'n't. You know they talk about the worm's turning. Well, I'm the worm. I'm turning just a little bit, but I shall begin to grovel again in a few minutes. You'll see."

Mrs. North's face became almost gray. She was sure now that she had never been so frightened in her life. And she was deeply indignant that she was frightened. Of course nothing less than the beginning of frenzy could account for such talk and such a manner.

Mrs. North was very far from being imaginative, but she began to think of mad dogs. And she hardly knew whether she was perfectly sane in thus thinking.

After a slight pause Mr. North began again.

"You see you can imagine part of my reasons for not calling at Grove's. Now I'll give you another. This isn't a real pleasant thing I'm going to tell you. But why shouldn't you know? Ain't you bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, I should like to know?"

Mrs. North tried to shrink away somewhat from the man beside her, but she was a large woman. She was obliged to remain near him. She did not know what was coming. She had thoughts of asking to get out and walk. But her mind was still fumbling to such a degree that she could not even speak. She began to wish she had some camphire. What was she coming to, that she should need camphire again so soon?

Even her perceptions enabled her to suspect that her husband was not greatly rejoiced at the knowledge that she was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. All the same, she should go right on cooking the dishes he liked and keeping his clothes clean and mended. She was one of those women

who knew what was their duty. And she was going to do her duty under all circumstances.

In the silence that followed, and in the midst of her distress, she continued to be curious.

She fixed her eyes on her husband. She saw that he was as white as he could be beneath the tan. A thought of a certain kind of bitters went through her mind. She guessed his blood needed strengthening. She would steep something to "work in his blood."

"You remember how Grove fell off the wharf the other day in Boston?"

She thought this a very foolish question. Of course she remembered. And she replied to that effect. Didn't they have to stay in Boston all night on that account? And Colburn's best trousers would never look so well again, although she had spent one whole forenoon in pressing them.

"Well," said Mr. North, "I pushed him in!"

XIV.

MRS. NORTH'S NOTE

Again Mrs. North tried to shrink away from her husband, and again she found that she could not do so.

She had heard him say that he pushed Mr. Grove into the water, but she did not believe the statement. It was only a symptom of approaching insanity. Hadn't she seen Colburn jump in after the deacon? Now, if she had been so exceedingly sinful as to forget that she was a church-member and do such a deed, she shouldn't have changed her mind and have undone it.

"How does the affair strike you, Roxy?"

Mr. North put this inquiry in the most reckless manner.

He had no fear that his wife would reveal what he had confessed. Still, in his present mood, he cared very little if she should do so.

When Mrs. North felt sure that she had the control of her tongue and lips she said,

"I wish you'd stop the horse, Colburn. I'd jest as lief walk the rest of the way."

"You can just as well ride. I'm going right by the house."

"I'd as lief walk," said Roxy.

But her husband didn't stop the horse. He continued to drive on.

The woman sank back upon the seat. Her imagination had become so active that she now asked herself if it were likely that Colburn had secreted his razor about him, and would suddenly draw it for the purpose of cutting her throat.

This unwonted exercise of the imagination had the most

confusing effect. Mrs. North was even conscious that her heart beat.

"Having pushed him in," now said Mr. North, "and given him a rheumatic fever—did you say 'twas rheumatic? —do you think I'm going to inquire about him? No, I don't feel like it. I've obeyed you tolerably well, Roxy, but I guess I'll draw the line here."

Roxy turned her helpless face deliberately towards her husband.

"But—but you pulled him out," she managed to say.

And she watched North's hands to see if they made any movement towards a hidden razor. She wondered if she could jump over the wheel. She knew she could not. She must stay there and have her throat cut from ear to ear. For that was what men did frequently with razors.

Anyway, she was glad she had always cooked Colburn's victuals to suit him.

"Yes, I pulled him out. You see, I wasn't one of those real, genuine, double-dyed villains who can stick to a good thing. He was so devilish provoking—and I kept thinking of Kitty, and how she would be free. And he was close to the edge after we'd landed, and the people crowding round. All at once it seemed the best chance in the world to straighten things out. I just crowded up with the rest, and I found it easy enough to do. I remembered he couldn't swim. And I was glad of it. Of course, somebody would have pulled him out if I hadn't. But when I saw him in the water I couldn't stand it. It was too horrible."

Here the man shuddered.

"So I just went after him. But if the wretch is going to be sick and die because he happened to fall into the salt water that day, you see it leaves me with rather a load on my mind."

Mr. North looked grimly ahead along the road. His wife looked at him. There was silence between the two.

At last Mrs. North began again to smooth her shawl over her knees. Her mind groped after something, she knew not

what. She recalled that it was preparatory lecture at their church that evening, and she was dimly grateful, although she could not see what bearing a preparatory lecture would have on the fact that her husband had attempted to drown some one and had then rescued that person.

After a while Mrs. North suggested once more that she could walk the rest of the way. But she was really hardly aware that she spoke.

Mr. North's expression softened somewhat as he looked at her and saw the unmistakable signs of bewilderment and suffering.

"It would be just like him to die," he said. Then he laughed and added, "Only he'll want to live for the chance of marrying again."

"Colburn," said his wife, "I wish you wouldn't laugh. If he dies you'll be responsible. I hope there won't nobody find this out."

"There isn't much likelihood of that. If he dies"—here a solemn intensity came to the speaker's voice—"I ought to be glad of it. Kitty 'll be a free woman, with some hope in the world."

"Colburn," said his wife, "I wish you wouldn't. You frighten me."

But Colburn made no response to this remark. It would require some time for him to adjust his mind to the idea that his wife could be frightened.

When they reached the gate of Deacon Grove's place Mr. North let his wife climb out of the wagon unassisted. He watched her as she walked up the path between the smoke-trees. And as he watched he repeated to himself, "As long as they both shall live."

Then he drove on, without a suspicion that his wife was afraid he had concealed a razor about his person.

Mrs. North found the Feeding Hills doctor selecting something from his medicine-chest in the sitting-room. This room already had that peculiar odor of paregoric which is so associated with old-school country physicians.

The doctor paused in the act of touching his tongue to the stopper of a phial.

"Good-morning, Mrs. North," he said, with extreme cheerfulness. "I hope you've brought your daughter with you, eh? The place for a wife is by her husband's side, eh? And Grove is going to have a serious time—serious time, I fear."

He lifted another phial and smelt of its contents. "Rheumatic fever — long-winded, tedious — complications very likely. Better send for your daughter. Of course she'll come now. Girls have whims, but this isn't a time for whims."

He compounded something in a glass, which he filled half full of water. He rose from his chair, briskly stirring the liquid with a spoon and sniffing at it. He was so very cheerful as to seem almost out of place in a house where rheumatic fever with complications was present. But if a doctor isn't going to be cheerful in the midst of illness, when will he indulge that disposition?

Mrs. North was glad of an opportunity to sit down away from her husband. When she had started from home she had in mind several excellent recipes of things to do in case of different fevers. Now she could think of nothing.

She took off her gloves and made them into a ball by turning one inside of the other. She thought she would offer to watch, if the sick man had begun to have watchers. But she would have to go home first and arrange for Colburn's meals.

And she meant to start out and walk before it was time for her husband to come back. She did not find herself quite able to contemplate sitting beside a man whom she suspected of having a razor about him, ready for use on throats.

"How is Mr. Grove?" she inquired.

"Bad, very bad," was the reply with even greater cheeriness of demeanor. "And he'll be worse before he is better."

"Who's goin' to nuss him?" she asked.

"Miss Riddle is here for the present."

"You don't mean 'Gusty Riddle?"

"Yes."

The two looked at each other, and the doctor smiled broadly, but he said nothing until after a somewhat long pause.

Then he remarked again that a man's wife ought to be with him.

He gazed keenly at the woman as he said this. He did not try to conceal his curiosity. He, like all the rest of the community, had been greatly interested in Deacon Grove's fourth marriage and in his wife's subsequent action. The whole affair was an inexhaustible theme for talk all through Feeding Hills.

Nothing had happened since that could serve to take the public mind from that topic.

Mrs. North's face was imperviously stolid. She was not even going to say that a man's wife ought to be with him. She did say, however, that 'Gusty Riddle was said to be a most excellent nuss.

The doctor nodded. He knew a great many of the ins and outs of nearly all the families for miles around, and he greatly enjoyed that knowledge. But he had never felt that he knew much about this affair of Grove's.

The girl was not like the rest of the girls around there.

He used to attend her in those various attacks of the croup; but when a child is very small, and is struggling with the croup, you cannot judge with any certainty what she will be when she is grown and is influenced to a distasteful marriage.

Presently the doctor went out of the room with the tumbler of medicine in his hand.

He could be heard going up the stairs which led from the front entry, and then his steps were audible in the room above. In this manner Mrs. North discovered that the deacon was sick in the spare chamber.

After a few moments she rose and went into the kitchen.

She heard some one there, and she wanted to know if Mr. Grove's old housekeeper was still doing the work. Besides, the widow Amos Morse might communicate some items of interest. And, first of all, Roxy wanted to know how 'Gusty Riddle happened to be there.

Mrs. Morse was on her knees with a pail of water and a dish of yellow soap beside her. She said she hoped Mis' North would excuse her gittin' up, for when she was down it was hard to git up, 'n' when she was up it was hard to git down; and that she weighed more'n she used to when she was young.

From the size of the Widow Morse all of these assertions were probably strictly true.

She rubbed soap on to her mop and then bent forward to wash the board in front of her. As she did so she told her visitor to take that chair by the stove where the floor was washed, and make herself to home. She explained that there wa'n't no use standing on ceremony when there was sickness in the house.

Mrs. North sat down. She looked at the clock. Colburn could not be more than half-way to the west part of the town now.

As Mrs. Morse was wringing out her mop she said that if a man had a wife it was "usually expected she'd help take care of her husband when he was sick."

"Mis' Morse," said the visitor, "I done all I could."

"I ain't blamin' nobody in partic'lar," was the response, "only it is gen'rally the case that a wife helps take care of her husband when he's sick. I s'pose your Katharine's havin' a good time to the shore."

Mrs. North could hardly repress a groan, but she did repress it. She answered that she shouldn't think, for her part, that Katharine would have a good time anywhere.

Her anger against the girl was growing daily. And her belief was increasing that all the disagreeable things that had happened since that wedding-day were Katharine's

fault—even to the pushing of the deacon into the water and the rheumatic fever that now held him in its power.

"Girls are monstrous queer things," said Mrs. Morse.

Mrs. North did not now repress the groan. Then she remarked that she understood from the doctor that 'Gusty Riddle was in the house as nuss. Hadn't 'Gusty got no shame?

The floor-washer sat back on her heels, with her mop in one hand and her cake of soap in the other. She gazed at the woman in the chair by the stove.

"I ain't dyin' in love with 'Gusty myself," she said, "but somebody 'd got to nuss the deacon, and you know very well, Mis' North, that I, with my flesh, 'n' the housework, 'n' the butter to make, couldn't be expected to do it. 'Tain't in reason."

"No, 'tain't," responded Mrs. North. "But I should have thought that anybody who'd tried to git Mr. Grove, as everybody knows 'Gusty tried, would kinder hated to come here like this—now he's married, too. Did he send for her?"

"I d' know exactly how that was; but I ruther think, knowin' 'Gusty 's I do, that she took care that the deacon knew that, sence old Mis' Newton died, she's been out of a job."

"I bet she did," said Roxy, with more emphasis than she usually used. "But the deacon ain't a single man now, and he never did take to 'Gusty Riddle."

"He ain't the only man that don't take to her"—here Mrs. Morse chuckled. "But nobody can't say she ain't a good nuss."

"No," acquiesced Mrs. North, "nobody can't say that. Is that her on the stairs?"

She turned her head to listen.

The next moment the door opened, and a woman of about forty appeared. The front of her hair was carefully arranged in a curly fluff. The back hair was a faultless French twist. She had on a light blue print gown with a white ruffle at the throat.

She had almost colorless, extremely prominent eyes, a little nose, and a chin inclined to come forward too much. She also had a girlish air. She walked with a kind of skip; she laughed with almost every word she said; then she would catch herself up as if she ought not to give way so much to the habits of youth. She looked good-natured.

"'Tis you, ain't it, Mis' North?" she said as she entered. "I didn't really believe it was, but the deacon he stuck to it you hadn't gone—the doctor said you'd called—and the deacon says he wants to see you 'fore you go."

She laughed gently as she ceased speaking. She announced, with another laugh, that she guessed she'd put on the farina kettle 'n' make that custard while there was a fire. The doctor said the deacon might have a custard.

Roxy glanced at the clock again. She reckoned that Colburn had just about reached the west part.

She rose from her chair and said she guessed she'd go right up.

'Gusty, having placed the kettle over the fire, hastened to lead the way. She turned to say in a whisper that it did seem as if a man's wife ought to be with him when he was sick.

And again Mrs. North replied,

"I done the best I could."

"Everybody says you couldn't done no more," 'Gusty hastened to say consolingly.

Marcellus Grove was lying restlessly in his bed. His head was bound with a handkerchief; his face was crimson.

He flung his arms out. Miss Riddle carefully tucked them in again and reminded him of what the doctor had said about a chill.

The man mumbled something which a malicious person might interpret as being that a chill might be damned.

Mrs. North sat in a chair and leaned over him. The deacon glared up at her.

"I want Kate to know about this," he said. "I want you to see that she does know, right away."

Then he flung his arms out again. 'Gusty advanced and tucked them in.

"Right away," he repeated.

"I'll send a letter to-day," answered Mrs. North. "But don't build nothing on it."

"You tell her she's to blame for this," went on the deacon, more excitedly. "If she hadn't done as she has I shouldn't have gone to the shore, and then fallen into the water. It's the least she can do to come here now. I don't ask her to take care of me. She ain't had any experience. But she ought to be here."

He rose on one elbow and repeated his last remark very loudly.

He was gently pushed down on the pillow by 'Gusty, who again spoke of a chill.

Roxy did not think she could bear to hear him say anything more about falling into the water.

She rose. She said he might depend upon her doing what she could, but he mustn't build nothing on it.

She almost hurried down the stairs and out of the front door. She walked down the road, fearing all the time that she should hear the wheels of Colburn's wagon behind her. And she was composing the letter she would send to her daughter.

Her husband need know nothing about it. She wanted to make the letter as strong as possible. She almost dared hope that Deacon Grove's sickness was providential. But when she thought of how it had been brought about she didn't feel so sure of the providential part of it. But Providence worked in a mysterious way.

This time Mrs. North was moved to act immediately.

Therefore it came to pass that the next afternoon when Mrs. Llandaff received her mail she came to a letter addressed to her which, when she opened it, she found contained a sealed envelope with the word "Katharine" laboriously written upon it.

She knew her sister's writing. It had not changed much

since the time when the two sat side by side and struggled beyond slanting marks between ruled lines.

Mrs. Llandaff raised her eyes and looked at her niece.

The girl was half lying on a couch by the window. She had a book in her hand, but she was not reading. Her face was turned towards that lovely coast-line which stretches away along the ocean edge of Cohasset.

Even in these few days there was a great difference in Katharine. The expression of the eyes, as if their owner were watching and listening in a more or less harassed manner, was gone. The lines about the lips had changed in some indescribable way. There was an air of freedom and hopefulness.

Mrs. Llandaff was keenly conscious of this change. This consciousness brought with it to her a fuller sense of the joys of life—a fuller sense than she had expected could be hers again.

And now, what was the mother writing?

For an instant Roxy's sister felt a temptation to send back that letter without allowing the owner of it to see it. But Mrs. Llandaff's temptations had never been strongly in the line of any kind of underhand proceeding.

"Kitty," she said, "here's something from your mother."

The girl started. Her eyes dilated; a wave of color rose to her forehead and then subsided into pallor.

She had been roused from a vague and exquisite dream which the sky, and the shore, and the water, and the presence of her Aunt Kate had called into being.

She rose, feeling as if she were suddenly thrust down into blackness.

She took the letter and went back to the window. She hesitated an instant with it in her hand. It was terrible to have such a feeling towards her mother.

Mrs. Llandaff did not look at her; she went into her bedroom, leaving the girl alone. She laid herself down on the bed, and after a little she was lulled by the sound of the waves and the heat, and she fell asleep.

It seemed to her that she had slept a long time when she felt her hand grasped tightly. She heard Katharine saying,

"Aunt Kate, will you wake?"

She opened her eyes and smiled reassuringly at the girl.

"Of course I'll waken; though I haven't been asleep—that is, I have been dreaming. But what is it?" she sat up suddenly. "What has your mother been doing now? Let me see that letter."

But Katharine did not relinquish the letter. Her fingers closed tightly on it.

"Aunt Kate," she said, "I think I shall have to go back."

"Go back where?"

"To Feeding Hills."

Mrs. Llandaff now rose from the bed. She seized her niece by the arm and led her to the window.

The girl's face was gray and set. It was so set that the elder woman dropped the arm and drew back a step.

"I see you are going to be perfectly unreasonable," she said. "I tell you I have a mind to lock you up in your room. I thought you had got beyond being influenced by your mother."

"It isn't mother."

Katharine leaned against the window-casing.

She looked desperate and hopeless and, as her aunt had said, "perfectly unreasonable."

"But it's your mother who has written?"

"Yes."

"It can't be that—that widower?"

"He is ill."

Mrs. Llandaff's eyes flashed.

"And your mother is playing upon your conscience. She wants you to go and take care of him. Oh, I don't love my sister!"

The woman flung out one hand dramatically.

"You don't think I'd go for Mr. Grove?" cried Katharine.

"For whom, then? Don't you see you mustn't go there at all?"

The girl's hands shut themselves tightly. But she held herself perfectly still.

"It's for father. It's for father," she answered. "Don't you think I'd do anything for him?"

"But he can't ask this of you. Child, don't you think I know Colburn North?"

The woman's voice thrilled somewhat in that last sentence. Katharine gazed eagerly at her as if she could almost hope for some solution, some way out of the trouble which had come upon her.

But she knew directly that she could not.

"No," she said, "he doesn't know that mother has written. But it's for him, all the same. Don't you think I'd do a great deal for my father, Aunt Kate? He's been my comfort. My father has loved me. And he's in trouble. I don't think I ought to tell what it is. It's—it's something he has done. I would even try to nurse Deacon Grove for father's sake."

"Is it that you may nurse that man that you are going to Feeding Hills?"

"I don't know. If father wants me to do that— But I must get ready; I ought to take the next boat to Boston."

"Go and get ready then," responded Mrs. Llandaff.

Her manner told that she had given up all idea of trying to restrain her niece.

And she seemed almost cold, so that Katharine's heart, as she looked at her, gave a great beat of agony.

But the girl controlled herself and walked away.

She left the room and went towards her own room. Reaching it, she stood outside the door a moment, trying to think what were the trivial things it was necessary for

her to do to prepare to go in the next boat. She found it difficult to bring her mind to the subject. She was going to leave her Aunt Kate. That fact weighed upon her so desolately that she could not see much further. And her Aunt Kate had somewhat disappointed her; but of course she had irritated Mrs. Llandaff beyond endurance. That lady had a thousand interests in life, while she—the girl—oh, what interest in life had she now? Only to help her father if he were in trouble, and he was in trouble on her account.

A strong whiff of salt air came rushing down the corridor where she stood. It came from the end which opened broadly upon a balcony overlooking the bay.

Involuntarily she walked towards the balcony. She was thinking, "I will look at the water again. I shall have to go somewhere to earn my living, but of course I shall never come back here any more."

She stepped out on the balcony.

As she did so, Llandaff, who was leaning upon the railing with a telescope in his hand, turned immediately.

He put down the glass hurriedly and took off his cap.

He came close to her with that unconsidered and almost involuntary movement which means a great deal in a man accustomed to the minute restraints of society.

"Miss North," he exclaimed, almost in a whisper, "what has happened to make you suffer so? Oh! do let me help you!"

It seemed as if he were going to take her hand, but he did not. He stood for an instant inclining towards her.

Katharine's face turned towards him. She knew with a kind of rush of feeling and intense thankfulness his desire to be of use to her.

"Do let me help you!" he repeated.

Then he stood upright, conscious that, though no windows opened on the little balcony, some eyes might see them and note his unconventional attitude.

"How kind you are!" she said in the same half-voice

he had used in speaking. It was a voice that gave a certain confidential air to the interview, and that made it have a still more decided power in Llandaff's memory.

The young man knew that he ought to resume his usual manner. He was sure that he ought; but how could he resume it with a face like that looking up at him with complete artlessness.

He was at this moment having ocular demonstration that he had never in his life before seen a woman's face without more or less self-consciousness in it. He had not believed it possible that—here his thoughts went off into a fascinating vagueness.

Katharine drew back a step—

"I wanted to look at the water again," she said.

XV.

AN UNINVITED GUEST

LLANDAFF tried to smile in his usual easy way. But his success was not great, for the intense expression in his eyes modified his attempt.

"To look at the water again?" he asked; "and why shouldn't you—and many more times, also? Mrs. Llandaff will stay here a week or two longer, at least. She likes to give the first of the summer to the ocean, and the last to the mountains."

"Yes," said Katharine with a somewhat vague glance at the sea.

"And she told me she should keep you with her," said Llandaff.

"But I must go away; I must go away now. It is very hard for me, Mr. Llandaff."

Though she spoke his name aloud, she yet uttered the words as if she were pronouncing them to herself.

She turned towards the entrance to the balcony.

Llandaff followed her closely, almost mastered by a powerful impulse of sympathy for this girl and attraction to her.

"You are not really going to leave Mrs. Llandaff?" he said with some harshness.

"Yes; I must."

She was strongly inclined to tell him why, but she remembered her aunt's advice—that she should not tell her story; that it was not necessary, and was painful in the telling.

"But I thought you loved Mrs. Llandaff," exclaimed the

young man. He wanted to fight her decision that she would go away.

"Love Mrs. Llandaff!" passionately repeated Katharine. Then she flushed and smiled, and added in a low tone, "Oh, yes, I love her."

Llandaff could not find anything to say. He stood there looking at his companion, who in an instant glanced up at him and told him she was glad he had been so kind to her. She said she had felt that he wished to be good to her.

He smiled somewhat ruefully. He was trying to imagine Miss Wyckham as thanking a man for being kind to her.

Katharine extended her hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Llandaff." He took the hand.

"Good-by, Miss North." She hurried to her room, having spent five minutes of the time in which she ought to have been preparing for her departure.

As for Llandaff, he was all at once conscious of a fear lest he might accidentally meet Miss Wyckham, to whom he was engaged, and to whom he had believed himself attached in just that reasonable, comfortable way which would justify his "ranging himself."

He was sure that his face must have an expression upon it that ought not to be seen. Involuntarily he passed his hand across his eyes. He hastened out towards the beach. He walked rapidly over its smooth, enticing floor. A hard, wide beach is a place where one may walk on and on without having the least sense of the distance traversed; particularly if the walker be a young man who has just discovered that the woman he intends to marry is not the woman who has the supremest attraction for him.

Frequently during this walk, which extended even to Hull village, Llandaff addressed to the ocean such remarks as this:

"I am an idiot."

Then a dozen impatient strides, a nervous lifting of his hat from his head that the vigorous east wind might sweep upon it, and the words:

"A senseless donkey."

He smiled derisively at himself.

"That tin-spoon girl has gone to my head. What man on this earth could meet the look of such a face and—yes, I am an unmitigated donkey. And I am also soliloquizing on the sea-beat shore. It would be interesting to know what I am coming to. But I know—I am going to be Miss Ella Wyckham's husband. And I shall hand her in and out of her carriage; and I shall carry her fan and bouquet upon occasion; and I shall forget the tin-spoon girl who thanked me for being kind to her."

Thus he went hurrying on over to Hull, from which village he came back prosaically in the steam-cars which desecrate the length of the lovely little peninsula.

Katharine had no time to try any means by which to divert her thoughts from her distasteful duty.

It required but a few moments to put her things together. She would have them taken to the landing by the express. She would walk. She must not spend money to be carried, even in a barge.

She went to her aunt's door and knocked. The door was opened immediately by Mrs. Llandaff, who was in bonnet and travelling-dress.

"I was afraid you wouldn't be ready. I have ordered a carriage. It is time to go," said the lady.

Katharine's face suffused with light. She put out both her hands and grasped Mrs. Llandaff's wrists.

"You aren't going with me?" she cried under her breath.

"Certainly I am. Do you think I shall let you go out to Feeding Hills and see your mother alone? Indeed not. Your mother is like a bull-dog. She never gives up. Even though she might seem to give up, she doesn't. I know her very well."

Katharine almost laughed at this cup of comfort offered to her so unexpectedly.

"But I find I'm rather of a bull-dog myself, Aunt Kate. There are some things that I've made up my mind about."

Here the girl's face took on for an instant that curious look like her mother.

When the two were seated in the boat Katharine drew out Mrs. North's letter. Although every word had flashed plainly on her mind, she wanted to look at it again.

She was addressed as "Daughter Katharine," and Mrs. North began directly upon the main subject and ceased when she had disposed of that.

"I esteem it as my duty," she wrote, "to inform you that your father has been led away by Satan."

Here the reader's lip, interested vitally as she was, curled contemptuously. But her face rapidly changed to a stern and wondering setness as she went on.

"He tried to kill Mr. Grove. Owing to an overruling Providence, Mr. Grove is still alive. It is not known that your father tried to kill him; Mr. Grove himself does not know it."

Katharine's brain whirled a little here, but she had not much more to read.

"In my opinion," wrote Mrs. North, "it would be a help to your father if you came home. Your father is suffering considerable. Now I leave the whole matter in the hands of God."

Roxy had never in her life gone through such a mental exertion as was required in the composition of this epistle. She wanted to tell the truth, but she wanted to tell it in the boldest and most startling way.

If Katharine would not come for her father's sake, she would never come.

Notwithstanding all that had passed, Mrs. North still found it altogether impossible to conceive that there could be any matter upon which she could not have her

own way. That which has never happened cannot happen.

If she might bring Katharine to the spot, who knew what might be accomplished ?

And there was 'Gusty Riddle. On the last two occasions when the deacon had become a widower 'Gusty had—well, Mrs. North would not attempt, even in her own mind, to specify the blandishments employed by that trying old maid.

And now Roxy had not the least doubt in her own mind but that 'Gusty was contemplating the probability of a divorce. Having nursed Mr. Grove through a wearing illness, that gentleman, weakened by fever and gratitude, would "get a bill," and then he would reward 'Gusty Riddle by making her his fifth wife.

All these contingencies were continually present in Mrs. North's mind.

Since Colburn had been the means of giving the deacon the rheumatic fever, it might naturally enough turn out that an overruling Providence should use this means to bring Kate to her senses.

Roxy North was one of the many people who believe in an overruling Providence that acts on their side, but never against them.

Knowing that her husband would, on Kate's arrival, discover that she had been written to, that night at supper Mrs. North casually remarked that "she should some expect Kate the next day."

Mr. North laid down his knife and fork with a movement that did not promise tranquillity for the next few moments, and that forcibly reminded Roxy of concealed razors.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked loudly.

"I said I should some expect Kate to-morrow."

"I heard what you said. Now I want to know what you mean."

Mrs. North continued to chew her bread, but she did not, as she would have expressed it, "sense the taste of it much."

It was as chaff in her mouth.

"I thought," she said, "that there was a Providence in it."

"A Providence in what?" fiercely.

"In your pushing the deacon into the water, 'n' his having a fever. I felt's if 'twas a means of drawin' husband 'n' wife together."

"So you wrote to Kitty; and you played on my being a guilty wretch; and you think this will make her come home? By George!"

Mr. North rose violently from the table. He wondered what his wife would do next, and he felt as helpless as a puppet in her hands. Should he not dance if she pulled the strings? And he was going to live with her year after year. He thought grimly that they were both tough and would last a good while. If it were not for his daughter he did not care how subserviently he crawled. He had crawled all his life. And to what would a little temporary rebellion amount?

It was rather singular that the fact that he had dared to push Grove into the water, even while Mr. North regretted the act, should still give him a sense of power and rejoicing. He was sorry he had done it, but he was glad of it.

And he was keenly aware that his wife was struggling with something like fright concerning him. He was glad of that, too.

There was, however, always the possibility present with him that Grove would die in this fever. In that case would he not pay a great price for Kitty's freedom?

And his wife was tormenting Kitty again. Why hadn't Katharine Llandaff taken the child to the uttermost ends of the earth?

He would tell her she must take her. He would go to Nantasket the next day that he might tell her. He was sure that the Katharine Hillard whom he had once known would do that much.

Oh, it was a weary life to live.

While Mr. North strode about the room under the influence of bitterness unspeakable, Roxy continued calmly biting into her thick slice of bread. She always wanted her bread cut in thick slabs.

At last the man stopped on the other side of the table. He smiled with some triumph as he said,

"I guess you've got your match, Roxy. You see your daughter has come upon the rock in her character. Oh, I guess you've got your match. And Kitty has some brains, too."

Mrs. North spread her butter more evenly on her bread. She said she "hoped she should be able to make Kate see that she'd better do what she could to help Deacon Grove get well, just for her father's sake. She reckoned the doctor would advise that everything should be tried. The doctor had already advised that—"

But at this stage of Roxy's talk she was interrupted by a forcible remark from the man looking down at her from the other side of the table.

"Now, just see here a minute, Roxy: I'd rather go through Feeding Hills and tell every man and woman in the place that I pushed the deacon into the water than to have Kate go there and help take care of him. Can you take that in, eh?"

Here Mr. North thrust his hand into his right-hand trousers pocket, exactly as if he were going to pull out a razor.

Roxy rose in a hurry. Having the idea of a concealed razor firmly in her mind, it was natural that the woman could not get the idea out.

As she stood up behind her chair she wondered, for the first time, if Colburn ought not to be put in an asylum. She wondered if she should have to see the selectmen about him. But he was one of the selectmen himself. She might be obliged to see the others.

This idea was dreadful to her, but it had a powerful fascination also.

If it should really become necessary to put Colburn in an

asylum he wouldn't be held responsible. And she could perhaps make Kate see her duty. But no—if Colburn were not responsible, Kate wouldn't feel obliged—here the woman's slow brain began to grow cloudy and bewildered. She didn't understand why she, exemplary as she had always been in every way, should be tried thus.

"Colburn," began Roxy, but her mind was as stiff as her lips and tongue. She could not frame a sentence; worse, she did not know what kind of sentence she wished to frame. Mr. North turned and walked out to his retreat, the barn. Mrs. North began to gather up the dishes from the table. She always remembered that evening, because she went to the salt-box and filled the sugar-bowl from that receptacle.

The next day, before Mrs. North had begun to expect her daughter, the depot-carriage drove into the yard. At that moment her hands were in a pan of Dutch cheese, into which she was manipulating some cream and salt.

She seized a towel, and, wiping off the curd as she went, she opened the screen-door and walked into the yard.

Katharine was just springing from the step of the wagon. Even in that moment, and with her not too keen perceptions, Mrs. North was aware of some change in the girl. What was it?

But she had come. That was the main point.

The mother advanced and scrupulously kissed her daughter's left cheek, as she had done when the girl had left to tend tables at the shore.

"I guess you got my letter?" said Mrs. North.

"Yes, I did. Where's father?"

"I d' know. I guess he's gone to the corn-field. We didn't know's you could git here this time of day. What! Did your aunt come?"

For now Mrs. Llandaff began leisurely to emerge from the depths of the immense covered wagon.

"Yes, Aunt Kate came with me. I want to see father. I'll go over to the corn-field."

"No," said Mrs. North, "you needn't go. He'll be comin' back most any time now."

The girl looked at her mother.

"I think I'll go," she said. "I want to see him."

And she walked quickly away across the road and down the field behind the barn.

Mrs. Llandaff, having heard this conversation, and having paid the driver, turned smilingly towards her sister. The two shook hands, Mrs. North with undisguised perfunctoriness.

"I guess, Roxy," said Mrs. Llandaff genially, "that you have run against a snag, as they used to say when they were ploughing among the stumps."

Roxy could not reply. She only dimly knew what her sister meant. And she felt that it was almost an insult that Katharine should have come now. She hadn't been invited.

But Mrs. Llandaff apparently did not care whether she had been invited or not. She walked into the kitchen, and her sister helplessly followed her. She saw the pan of Dutch cheese, and she removed her gloves and helped herself to the white, delicate stuff, remarking, as she did so, that she had not known that flavor since the days when she used to make the cheese herself.

Her sister did not try to reply. She had sunk down in her own particular rocker, and was dismally swinging and creaking back and forth, watching the elegant woman make herself at home where she was not wanted.

No, she never could get along with Katharine.

Mrs. Llandaff sat down with a plate of cheese and a fork.

"I was curious to know what you had been writing to the child," she said. "I knew you didn't like to write letters. She suffered. She said it was about her father. Is anything the matter with Colburn?"

"I thought it was best to write," said Roxy.

"Yes, I suppose so," easily. "But I hope it was necessary, since you did it. And so that widower man is ill?

Perhaps he ll be so obliging as to die. Is there any chance of that ?"

"They've had two doctors," answered Mrs. North.

"Then there may be a chance that he'll die. You didn't think Kitty was going to nurse him, did you ?"

Silence on Mrs. North's part.

"Oh, you did think so? Well, I believe you'll be disappointed in that. Why," fixing her eyes steadily on her sister's face, "I would bind Katharine with cords before she should go there—unless she went from inclination. That's why I came up with her. And I'm going to stay as long as she stays. I couldn't tell what arguments and sophistries you'd bring into play. Not that she is not as resolute as you. She is. But you might make her think it was her duty to go to that man's house. It isn't. She hasn't a solitary duty that she owes to him. Are my words plain ? Do I make my position clear, Roxy North ?"

Mrs. Llandaff was really as powerful a woman in her way as her sister was in hers. And Mrs. North had a sense that she was being defeated again.

She gazed back at her sister Katharine. What was that compelling fire in that woman's eyes ? And how strongly it made her hate the owner of those eyes.

But she didn't call the feeling hate, she called it righteousness.

Mrs. Llandaff rose and placed her plate and fork on the table. With the action she resumed her easy air.

And her sister continued to sit there looking at her.

Outside, Katharine was walking across the hot pasture. The air was shimmering with the heat. Waves of it came up from the short grass and the huckleberry-bushes. The wind blew in lazy puffs as if from an oven. The cicadas continually gave out their piercing cries. Katharine saw a robin sitting on the limb of a wild apple-tree, with his wings raised and his bill open.

She stepped out of her way that she might not disturb him, but she scarcely knew that she did so. She only knew,

in a dim way, that the great heat was baking the earth; that it was filling her blood.

When she had crossed the pasture she mounted a low hill and looked down into the corn-field.

As her eyes swept along the lushly growing rows of corn her deep love for the country rushed over her, even in the midst of her other emotion. That torrid haze over the hills; the languid ripple of the shallow stream at the base of the elevation on which she stood; the heat-oppressed twitter of the song sparrows that were under the thick sprays of the cedars—all the sights and sounds of a pasture in midsummer affected her not only by their familiarity, but by their loveliness.

All the time her eyes were searching eagerly for her father.

There he was, in the middle of the corn-patch. He was just straightening himself from bending over his hoe.

Katharine ran down the slope and directly was hurrying among the long corn-blades which flapped against her face and neck. Mr. North heard his girl's voice saying, "Father," without having heard her footsteps, because of the noise his hoe made in the earth.

He dropped his tool and made a stride forward.

He took his daughter in his arms, making an inarticulate ejaculation as he did so. Then he held her away from him and looked at her.

"How you have changed!" he exclaimed. "What is it?"

"I didn't know I had changed," she answered; "but if I have, it is a few days' happiness with Aunt Kate. I didn't know that life could be so different; could have so much in it."

She paused, while her father continued to look at her.

"And then," she went on, her whole aspect altering—"then mother sent me this."

She held out her mother's letter.

"I was frightened. I thought I would do anything to help you, father. I didn't understand. Oh," clasping her

hands suddenly, "what is the matter? What has happened? Did you really try to—but I couldn't understand. And—it is dreadful to say it, but I almost doubted mother. There was but one thing for me to do—to come home and see you. Father, what has happened?"

Mr. North's eyes had hurried along the lines written by his wife, and those eyes had filled with a vindictive light as his mind took in the meaning of those words. He kept his gaze still on the paper as he said,

"She's made affairs rather bad, hasn't she? You see she's a woman who wants things to go just as she wants them to go. The deacon did get jostled off into the water. He had been very exasperating about you. I own I jostled against him. I was mad. But I jumped in and pulled him out to make things square again. Perhaps I oughtn't to have told your mother. But I did tell her."

Mr. North felt that he was doing very well in the way of counteracting that infernal letter, which he still held with apparent calmness in his hand.

"And is Mr. Grove ill?" inquired Katharine.

"Oh, yes, he's got a fever."

Katharine moved uneasily. The tenseness of the strain on her mind was relieved somewhat, but she continued to be deeply troubled.

Her father knew it, and he was resolved to undo, at almost any price, what his wife had attempted to do.

"The deacon's got something else," he remarked with a laugh.

"What is that?" quickly.

"'Gusty Riddle."

Katharine could not yet smile. But the cloud on her face lifted somewhat.

"Will she take care of him?"

"Everybody says she has jumped at the chance. Come, Kitty, smile a little."

"I'm afraid you haven't told me the worst of everything, father. I'm afraid to feel so relieved."

"Nonsense! You are not afraid your mother hasn't told you the worst, are you?"

"No; but—" here she turned with an entreating gesture towards her father, "I thought, perhaps, I could help you some, father. It was horrible for me to come, but I would do anything to help you. And this letter—"

Here the girl could not restrain a shudder. But she went on,

"I thought that I might have to go and take care of him, just because you had tried to hurt him, father. You can understand how I would want to help you, can't you?"

She grasped the sleeve of the man's jumper and gazed up into his face.

As for Mr. North, he could not speak. And he was still resolved not to appear to think seriously of the subject.

"Yes, I can understand you," he finally said, "because I would do anything for you. But let us drop all this talk. I'm going to see Mrs. Llandaff and advise her to take you away beyond reach of these small tempests in tea-pots. Meanwhile let us be easy in thinking that 'Gusty will take good care of the deacon."

"Mrs. Llandaff came with me."

"Did she?"

Mr. North started forward involuntarily.

"Is she up there with Roxy?" His features relaxed in a wonderful way. "That was kind. I wonder if she knew how kind," he said, as if speaking to himself.

He took up his hoe. "Don't let us make mountains out of mole-hills, Kitty. You go back with your Aunt Kate. We shall get along all right at Feeding Hills. Now let's go to the house."

As Katharine walked along behind her father among the corn, she said,

"I want you to promise me, father, if you think I can help you any time—oh, you know what I mean—that you'll send for me. Will you?"

"Oh, yes, I'll send for you fast enough, never fear," replied Mr. North, without turning his head.

When they arrived at the house they found Roxy still sitting in that chair and swinging back and forth.

She took no notice of their entrance. She was absorbed in wondering how it was that she did not have her own way.

And she wasn't having it.

Mrs. Llandaff rose from her chair and greeted Kate's father cordially. Then she looked at the clock, and remarked that if Colburn would harness immediately, they could be in time to take the next train.

Colburn nodded. Mrs. North moved her head until her eyes could rest upon her sister. Then she asked Mrs. Llandaff if she didn't think she'd better stay to dinner. Though they wa'n't goin' to have nothin' but a picked-up dinner.

She did not look at her daughter. But Katharine's glance dwelt on her mother's face with as much of wondering inquiry in it as if that face had been that of the Sphinx, and she was trying to know what it meant.

A few moments later, when her father drove to the door, Katharine went to her mother and held out her hand.

Mrs. Llandaff had already made her brief adieus and the two were alone.

Mrs. North lifted her hand and placed it loosely in that extended towards her. But she did not look up.

"Father explained to me, mother," said Katharine. "I don't think it's necessary for me to stay. He wouldn't want me to stay. Good-by."

Mrs. North made a slight sound.

As the girl left the room she glanced back and saw that her mother's head had drooped forward until her chin rested on her breast. She hesitated. Mrs. North signed for her to go on.

When the sound of the wheels had entirely died away the woman tried to rouse herself. She looked blindly about her. After a moment she pulled herself up by the arms of her chair. She went to the little table where the pan of Dutch cheese stood.

"I d' know," she said, gazing down at it, "whether I salted it or not."

She went to her chair and sat down again.

Two hours later, when Mr. North returned from the station, she was still sitting there. And the work was not "done up."

"Colburn," she said, "I d' know whether I salted that cheese or not."

XVI.

YOUNG MR. LLANDAFF HAS HIS WAY

"Owen," said Mrs. Llandaff, the morning after her return from her second visit to Feeding Hills.

As this single word was not immediately followed by any other remark, the young man made no reply. He sat waiting what should come next.

The two were at their particular end of a table in the dining-room of the hotel. It was after nine o'clock. Katharine had not yet formed the habit of rising late, and she had breakfasted more than an hour ago. At this moment she was sitting on the rocks near the water. She confidently believed that she could never get tired of sitting there.

She had not seen Llandaff since her return. She rather shrank from meeting him. He must think her a strange being to have been so nearly tragic the day before, and to have spoken thus of having one more look at the ocean.

She blushed at the recollection of how she had felt and seemed; and here she was back again after a few hours of absence.

Perhaps he would consider her a mild kind of lunatic, if he thought of her at all. He had been very kind.

At the breakfast-table Miss Wyckham had not yet appeared. Llandaff sat where he could, by raising his eyes, see the door through which she would come. He sat there watching for her, though he did not seem to be thinking of anything but his coffee and the Boston daily he had unfolded beside his plate. He dreaded to hear the sound

of her step along the hall and the swish of her trailing breakfast-gown. He knew precisely the difference between the sound of that gown and the sound of all the other gowns which were likely to be dragged across the floors. And the click of her shoes—here he took a sip of coffee.

He was a man who did not shirk in his own mind the genuine answers to questions.

He knew he shrank with painful sensitiveness from meeting Miss Wyckham. And he knew that this sensitiveness had sprung into a more active existence the day before on one of the balconies which overlooked the sea.

He faced the fact that he had not been able for one waking moment to forget Miss North's face or voice.

At first, for a little, he arranged a manful fight against this tendency, which was even now more than a tendency.

He fought a few hours. Then the fight suddenly became absolutely futile and senseless.

He was lying on the sand in a remote part of the Cohasset shore.

"I might as well fight with my own breath," he had said.

Having come to this conclusion, he pulled his hat over his eyes, and gave himself up to the memories that came with an overwhelming rush upon his soul.

Perhaps it is quite plain now why he dreaded to hear Miss Wyckham's step in the hall. And why, being a person of honorable instincts, he was becoming acquainted with a sense of stinging self-contempt.

It was a peculiarly detestable fate that had led him to decide at just this time that Miss Wyckham would be the proper wife for him, and that had prompted him to tell her so. If he had only considered the matter still longer before he had spoken.

"Owen," said Mrs. Llandaff again, having apparently forgotten that she had just pronounced his name, "I'm thinking of leaving here immediately."

"But it is earlier than you usually go to the mountains."

"One can't always keep on doing what one usually does," was the reply.

"True; particularly if one is a woman."

"Don't be disagreeable."

Llandaff was silent. He again began to listen intently for the approach of Miss Wyckham. And now he had a faint hope that perhaps she would not come to breakfast at all. But he must stay; he knew she would expect him to be there.

And if Mrs. Llandaff went away her niece would accompany her.

This sentence suddenly stood out in his consciousness with a kind of ferocious distinctness.

"I don't know that I am obliged to go to the mountains merely because I leave the South Shore," calmly went on Mrs. Llandaff, who had not yet really looked at her stepson. "I want to take Kate somewhere. She has been troubled of late about affairs at home. I want to get her out of the way. I suppose you, of course, will stay here, since Miss Wyckham remains longer."

The two were practically alone at this end of the table, and Mrs. Llandaff could speak thus if she chose, without fear of being overheard.

She now turned her glance upon the man opposite her. His features were absolutely calm, but when he lifted his eyes to met hers she said again, and this time with startled quickness,

"Owen!"

He laughed.

"Well? You almost appear as if you saw signs of incipient small-pox. I thought I was looking quite fit when I contemplated myself in the glass before leaving my room this morning."

"Yes, to others. But I know you very well, Owen."

"I am almost willing that you should know me," he said, with a sudden warm earnestness which affected his listener

more keenly than she could fully understand. Then he added instantly and lightly,

"But I'm not an interesting subject. Where are you going?"

"I have several places in mind; I think I shall toss up a penny for a decision, for there is really no choice. Here is Miss Wyckham at last."

Llandaff had heard her step with the keen sense of love —or dread.

He reviled himself as a hypocrite as he now devotedly applied himself to seeing that her wants were supplied.

"I was beginning to think you had a headache and were not coming," he said. But his glance swept over her face, and he could not force it to linger an instant.

Mrs. Llandaff had finished her breakfast, but she remained a few moments to study her step-son while she appeared to look over the paper he had given her.

She could not tell what had taken place in that young man's mind; she only knew that something had happened.

Miss Wyckham's countenance and bearing were serene and satisfied. Her lover had in his manner a trifle more of impressiveness than usual.

She was accustomed to impressiveness in a man's manner to her, and somehow she thought Llandaff's eyebrows gave a delightful flavor to his presence.

Mrs. Llandaff must have tossed up her penny for her decision immediately upon going to her room, for an hour later Llandaff was requested by a servant to call at that room.

The door was open, and trunks were going out on the shoulders of a porter.

"I suppose you don't forbid my visiting you—unless you are going into an absolutely exclusive spot?"

As he spoke, Katharine came from the inner room. She blushed slightly as she saw him. She was thinking again how sensational she must have seemed to him, bidding good-by to the ocean, and then returning immediately to it. She felt ridiculous.

"No," said Mrs. Llandaff. "You needn't take the trouble to visit us. You'll be fully occupied here."

The young man flung up his head in a rebellious way his step-mother had known since his boyhood.

"But you mean to tell me where you are going?" he asked.

She was drawing on her gloves. But at that instant she raised her eyes and saw Llandaff turn unconsciously towards the girl, who stood at the end of the room near a window.

It was a very slight movement—she was sure that no one else would have noticed it—and it was repressed instantly. But it revealed a possibility which made her shrink into herself with fear. At that moment she wished that she did not know Owen so well. His nature had always attracted her, and she had studied it with love from his boyhood. And if you study a person with love you will know the secret impulse of his actions.

Mrs. Llandaff's eyes went instantly to the girl. She saw that Katharine was ignorant; her very attitude showed that she considered her aunt's step-son almost in the light of a stranger.

"It is well we are going away," she thought.

"You really don't mean that you are not to tell me where you will stop?"

Llandaff spoke with some authority, and he gazed in the same way at Mrs. Llandaff, who, having drawn on her gloves, was now smoothing them. He advanced and deftly fastened the gloves. As he did so he continued,

"I'm not going to be treated in this way. And what if the world wants to be addressed by the great public speaker? And what if I should be obliged to say I didn't know where the great public speaker was? I should die of humiliation. And what would be the state of the world?"

Katharine had turned and was gazing at Llandaff and smiling. The man's eyes seemed to slide off of the elder face and rest upon the younger one. He was saying to him-

self, with a kind of reckless exultation, that he could not, he would not, fight against the vivid delight it gave him to look at that face.

Katharine had never heard any one talk nothings in that light kind of a way. She was amused, and she had a dim kind of feeling that this man was veiling something by this manner; she did not know what it was. Perhaps he was impatient to get away to that girl to whom he was engaged. But that made no difference to her. She met his gaze frankly, as she would have met her Aunt Kate's. She noticed how much light there seemed to be in his eyes.

"I've no idea what the state of the world will be," remarked Mrs. Llandaff, "but I'm not going to speak again this summer."

"Not even for the Ladies' United Association?"

"Not even for that."

"Oh, desolate world!" he cried. Llandaff was watching for the smile on Katharine's face. He went on,

"You may try to elude me, but I shall be like the vengeance of the villain in a novel. Must I say good-by now, or will you let me go to the boat with you? Of course you really make your start from Boston, so you will still be safe from my pursuit if I see you leave this wharf."

Without waiting for a reply, Llandaff took Mrs. Llandaff's hand-bag. He opened the door for the two, he followed them down the stairs, and he entered the carriage after he had helped them to their seats.

Mrs. Llandaff, during the short drive to the landing, could not quite read the meaning of their escort's face, well as she knew it.

But when the boat started and he had not gone ashore, she said in a low voice to him, as he stood behind the camp-chair he had placed for her,

"Owen, you should not have come. You can't return for several hours."

"But I know my way round in Boston," he replied.

She said nothing more until they had reached the wharf

in town. She did not like the persistence with which he kept by her side. She felt that she was getting nervous. Worse than that, she could almost have said she was conscious of a kind of superstition, as if something were going to happen.

Llandaff said very little to her and nothing to Katharine; still, he was scrupulously attentive.

He secured a carriage at the wharf and conducted them to it. As he held the door open he asked,

"Where did you say you would be taken, Mrs. Llandaff?"

"Owen, this is too bad," was the response, with a slight laugh.

"Where did you say?" inclining his head respectfully towards her.

Katharine looked at him and laughed also. But he did not appear to notice her.

"Of course it really makes no difference, since you are a gentleman," suddenly remarked Mrs. Llandaff. "But I sometimes believe in presentiments or convictions. And I had a conviction that it was my duty to take flight and leave no trace behind."

As she spoke she had taken her seat and had signed to her niece to sit beside her. Now she added, "To the Boston and Maine station."

Llandaff repeated the direction to the driver. And again he sat down opposite the two.

"I suppose," he said, "you had an object in reminding me that I am a gentleman?"

His tone was very serious. But his face did not show any signs of a change of purpose.

"I meant to convey that I had a general feeling of reliance upon you," replied Mrs. Llandaff.

"Thanks. I shall not ask you if you sincerely wish me not to know where you are going, because I mean to know."

The young man's mouth closed with a sternness which did not seem called for by the circumstances.

The carriage went winding in and out among the vehicles

on the street. Sometimes it stopped. On these occasions Mrs. Llandaff would take out her watch.

Katharine's gaze followed every carriage as long as she could see it. She had a strange feeling, as if her mind were almost a blank, and that she could not guess what would next be written upon it. She did not care where her aunt took her. She was sure of the one important thing, that the place would be strange, and that it would help to put the past month or two farther behind her, and then she should forget Mr. Grove. She was so eager to forget him. The vividness with which she received impressions would help her to that.

She was glad that she did not know where she was going. That was one of the enchanting things about her Aunt Kate —that she did not do things like other people.

She turned to look at the woman beside her. As she did so her eyes swept over Llandaff's face. He was gazing out into the street, but his eyes came instantly to meet hers.

His effort to speak was visible even to the girl, and she wondered at it.

"It's a mysterious expedition to you too, Miss North?"

"Yes," she answered. "I like it for that. But even if I knew the name of the place where we are going, that would tell me nothing, since I have never been anywhere."

"Never been anywhere? You don't know how you are to be envied. If I hadn't been everywhere I might be a happier man this day. But just now I am in the same position with you, Miss North—I don't know where I'm going. Still, the sensation isn't delightful to me. Mrs. Llandaff has reminded me that I am a gentleman. You know what that means? It means that she thinks I am not acting like a gentleman. I don't mind explaining to you, Miss North"—here the speaker bent forward that he might be the better heard in the roar of the street—"that I am sacrificing myself in this instance. Mrs. Llandaff is in my care. I am responsible for her safety—you see she is shrugging her shoulders at that idea; still, it is true. She will soon for-

give me. She always does. She thinks I am officious now, but she will in the end do me justice."

Having said this the young man sank back on his seat and resumed his contemplation of the moving street scenes.

When the party was in the waiting-room at the station he informed Mrs. Llandaff, with the manner of touching upon the subject for the first time, that he really should not be what people called "easy in mind" if she did not allow him to go with her and see her established. Surely she could trust him? Surely she knew he would keep a secret if she wished one kept. Tortures could not make him divulge where she was. The Ladies' United Association might go to eternal nothingness for lack of one speech from her before he would open his lips.

"You know you need me. You know I am invaluable to you. I promise not to stay unless you feel as if you couldn't live without me. But you must give me permission to go with you."

Two or three times since her knowledge of Owen, Mrs. Llandaff had seen him look like this, and at those times she had had an intuitive sense that she must yield to him.

She had that sense now. They started for a little hamlet on the coast of Maine, and long before the journey's end she told herself that that fleeting fear she had suddenly felt was utterly without foundation. She wondered that she had felt it. And yet she was a woman of intuitions; a woman who could read the slightest lifting of an eyebrow in a face she knew.

It is a curious fact that sometimes, in moments the most full of significance, the keenest-sighted become blind.

The last of the journey was a stage ride of two hours, and the settlement where the stage stopped was made up of perhaps a score of houses on a cliff overlooking the sea. A place more remote, more desolate to look at, one could hardly imagine.

"I spent a month here once," said Mrs. Llandaff. "And I rested all the time. I had to rest, for there was nothing

else I could do. Now I have come that I might have a chance to get acquainted with my niece. And I don't think any one here knows that I am a great public speaker. That in itself is a recommendation. Cap'n Marble's wife boarded me that summer. She boarded Cap'n Marble at the same time. She said she 'didn't make no money outer him,' and she should be obliged to make all the more out of me. She charged one dollar and seventy-five cents per week, and I had to pay extra for laundry work. Besides paying so much in money, I answered her questions. I wish I had made a note of all the questions I answered that summer. She asked how old I was. Think of asking that of a woman of my age, Owen!"

Owen looked quizzically at his step-mother.

"I have always longed to know," he said. "What did you tell her?"

"I quoted that convenient phrase that 'a woman is as old as she looks and a man as old as he feels.' You should have seen her face. But I made a point of replying literally to everything else, even to the size of shoes I wore and how long ago it was that my hair began to grow noticeably gray, and how much this diamond ring cost, and why I used a file on my nails generally rather than a penknife, and if I ever had the same dream three nights running, and many other things which might not interest this audience to hear."

"Good! Go on!" exclaimed Llandaff, whose spirits were now in an effervescent state.

But Mrs. Llandaff did not go on, though she caught Katharine's laughing, eager eyes upon her.

Mrs. Llandaff had learned what Owen had also learned, that there was this peculiarity about Katharine, that, even when she did not speak, she often had the effect of having done so, and that there was something subtly stimulating in the mere fact that she was present and was listening. If she were in a room the air held a property that was sensibly felt.

Mrs. Llandaff, who liked to study unusual effects, soon began to study this subject.

Just now, however, the three were walking along the one short street of the hamlet. And nearly every inhabitant along the street was looking at them.

They were on their way to Cap'n Marble's; and Cap'n Marble's was the last house—the one perched nearest to the edge of the cliff, and from which a flight of steps went down almost from the door-step to the beach below.

There was another entrance to the house, however, familiarly known as the "end door," and from this opening there now emerged a thin old man, clothed in much-faded pantaloons and an equally faded blue woollen shirt. He put up his hand to shade his eyes, although in his position he could only have been dazzled by the effulgence of his visitors, as the sun had gone down below the horizon.

But if he were dazzled he was in no way abashed. Cap'n Marble was not afflicted with shyness. He used to ask if he wa'n't 's good's anybody? And he would always answer his own question by the immediate assertion that he was as good if he behaved as well, 'n' he gen'rally calklated to behave.

This man now waited for the new-comers to approach. When they had reached him he put out a hand and said huskily,

"I guess it's Mis' Llandaff. You ain't changed a grain. Walk right in. My wife's ben havin' one of her turns, but she's comin' to now. Want to git board? We've had to rise on our price. Mebbe you won't want to pay two dollars. My wife said she couldn't scrub her fingers to the bone for no less. We 'ain't had anybody yet. Come in, I say. She's a'most out of her turn."

He spoke in a level, husky voice not much above a whisper, and he was one of those who do not seem to expect any reply.

He led the way in through the end door to the other side of the house, where he had left Mrs. Marble engaged in coming out of her turn.

Apparently she had fully emerged, for she came forward

with the utmost alacrity, stared intently for a moment, and then said that she guessed 'twas Mis' Llandaff, and that she hadn't changed a grain, adding that her husband had risen on the price of board, because he wouldn't go on fishing for no strangers at one dollar and seventy-five cents any more.

Here Cap'n Marble chuckled hoarsely.

The three were invited to sit down, which they did with great solemnity, and Mrs. Llandaff proceeded to arrange for the two upstairs rooms for herself and her niece.

Meanwhile, through an open window, the east wind was rushing in as if the house were a ship under full sail, and as if one might be liable to be sea-sick.

There was no sound but that of wind and water, and no odor but that deep, strong fragrance from the ocean which filled one's lungs and went thrilling through one's blood.

Katharine, as if impelled by a sudden vigor and joy born of that salt wind and that diapason of sound, rose from her chair and walked out of the house. She sat on those steps which led to the beach. It was nearly high tide. There was an almost painful fulness of life in the girl's pulses.

She was safe on this strange shore with her Aunt Kate.

There had been the ocean at Nantasket, but in comparison with this it seemed as if that had been toned some way by all those crowds which flocked to it.

Here was the primeval wilderness of waters.

"Miss North."

She started to her feet. Llandaff had come out and was standing upon the upper step.

"Can you give a mere human being your attention long enough to say good-by?"

She looked up at him from her place below.

"But you can't go to-night," she said quickly. "There's no stage and no train and no boat. You'll have to stay and be bored."

"No; I'm going to escape. Cap'n Marble knows a man who owns a horse. If I start in a quarter of an hour with

that horse and that man, I can reach somewhere where I can catch a train, which will stop somewhere else where I can take a night-train to Boston. You see, I shall not be obliged to be bored, after all. Good-by, Miss North."

"Good-by, Mr. Llandaff." He walked a few steps away; then he came back and said quickly,

"Miss North, don't be troubled about anything. Perhaps you exaggerate. It is so easy to do that, you know. I'm sure you're going to be happy—sure of it," with an uncalled-for earnestness that almost made his voice unsteady.

"Oh, thank you," she said eagerly; "but you know, Mr. Llandaff, it isn't necessary to be happy. I used to think so"—as if she were now old—"but I've given that up. And really it isn't necessary."

"Isn't it?" he asked, and his voice was now actually tremulous. He stood irresolutely a moment, looking down at her. But she was gazing off towards where the coast curved towards its most eastern point.

Then he said "Good-by" again, and this time he did not return.

"Was Owen saying something pretty about the ocean?" presently asked Mrs. Llandaff's voice from the door-way above.

"Oh, no. He said he hoped I wouldn't be troubled about anything."

"Did he? That boy is nothing if not sympathetic. I have tried to make him understand that it is weak to be too ready with sympathy. And he'll get into no end of a mess if he isn't careful!"

Katharine joined her aunt in the doorway. She put her hand through Mrs. Llandaff's arm. Her face was radiant.

"Do let the boy give his sympathy," she exclaimed; "he is so charming when he is sorry for one."

"Oh, is he?"

The long breath Mrs. Llandaff drew was one of infinite relief. After an instant's silence she added, "I don't think Ella Wyckham will need much of that emotion from

any one. She is one of those women who don't need anything; she is fully equipped."

"What a thing it must be to be that," said Katharine. "Only to think of it! If I lived a thousand years I know I should never be fully equipped."

Mrs. Llandaff smiled. She noted with a little surprise in her admiration the keen life in the face beside hers.

"I will confide to you, Kate," she returned, "if you will never betray me, that the people to whom I have been most drawn in my life have been those who have somehow missed that equipment."

Meanwhile Llandaff was journeying as fast as a large, hay-fed horse could carry him, which was not fast at all, towards his betrothed. And as he journeyed he was thinking chiefly of one face.

XVII.

LLANDAFF AND MISS WYCKHAM

WHILE Owen Llandaff devoted himself to Miss Wyckham in the following fortnight, his step-mother and her niece devoted themselves to each other with such success that the elder woman's face grew to have a rested look upon it, while the younger countenance at times wore an almost glorified expression.

On that remote Maine coast the existence of Marcellus Grove somewhere in Massachusetts was merely the existence of a myth. Katharine did not write home. She knew that her father and mother were ignorant as to where she was. She was content in the assurance her aunt gave her, that Mr. North only wished to be certain of hearing in case there was anything he ought to know. He preferred to be ignorant; he felt that ignorance was his best armor.

Now, for once, Katharine lived ideal days. She was free. The only eyes belonging to her which looked upon her were eyes of love and approval.

Mrs. Llandaff sauntered about with her, or sat for hours silently on the shore.

Many times the girl would turn slowly towards her companion, glance up at her, then turn away without speaking. Or she would take the woman's hand for a moment and say,

"Aunt Kate, this is freedom, isn't it? I am free to be myself."

Mrs. Llandaff would smile and respond,

"Little girl, are you happy?"

"Oh, yes."

"That is right. It isn't wicked in the least to be happy."

"I'm so glad to know that."

"Kate," said Mrs. Llandaff, "I don't believe in being miserable. When happiness comes your way, seize it, make much of it. What else is there? Of what else are you sure?"

Katharine gazed intently up at the sky, for at this moment she was lying on the sand. All at once she sat erect.

"Aunt Kate," she said, almost sharply, "but to be right, to have the right on your side—surely we must give up happiness for that."

The other smiled as she answered easily,

"Don't worry. Natures like yours never drift into a happiness that is wrong. Don't fall into any detestable habit of self-examination. Just live. What else are we here for? Just live, I tell you." Mrs. Llandaff began to speak more earnestly, and her mere voice had a peculiarly convincing power with any listener, and particularly with one so drawn to her as this girl already was.

"Kate, you are not having any doubts about the right or wrong of your leaving that man?"

"No, no. Not a doubt," strongly. "I was only thinking that I was almost afraid it must be wicked some way to be happy like this," gazing up at her aunt.

"Let me take the responsibility," was the rejoinder. "That was a horrible way—that way of inculcating a perpetual restraint, a constant snubbing of yourself. There's nothing so depressing as it is to fall into the habit of snubbing yourself. Others will do that for you all that is necessary. Give yourself to yourself with *abandon*. Good heavens! As long as you are not evil, why prune, and bend, and twist this or that inclination? And I'm tired of this fancy that we are so evil, that discipline is the business of life. There was a time when I experienced religion, and thought that I was a vile worm of the earth. But I've outlived all that. I don't think now I'm the least bit of a worm. I believe in enjoyment."

Mrs. Llandaff had not survived her earnestness. She had raised herself to a sitting position. Now she sank back again on the sand. She laughed as she added,

"I know a man who was often quoting that cynical saying, 'Be good and you'll be happy, but you won't have a good time.'"

"Oh!" exclaimed Katharine, "that is dreadful. You don't believe that, do you, Aunt Kate?"

But Mrs. Llandaff had finished her talk for the time. She only said languidly,

"It's not of the slightest consequence what we believe."

Then she closed her eyes, and Katharine's mind drifted in some indefinable way as it had never drifted before.

So the days went on in languid, utter idleness.

"When I rest, I rest," Mrs. Llandaff said. "You must know," with that good-natured, satirical smile she sometimes used, "that the drain upon a great public speaker is very severe. How can I charm the multitude if I do not recuperate thoroughly?"

Katharine listened and lived in the atmosphere of this woman. Sometimes involuntary, half-formed, but searching questions came into the girl's mind. Then she would fix her eyes on Mrs. Llandaff's face. But she found no answer. That attractive, refined countenance vouchsafed nothing at such times. Once, at the hotel, Katharine had heard some one say, in speaking of Mrs. Llandaff, "She looks as if she had enjoyed a great deal."

That remark had unreasonably startled the girl. She used to refer to it in her own mind. She had heard it said of this one or that, "She looks as if she had suffered a great deal." That did not seem strange. That was natural.

For an impressible nature, the mere living with a certain kind of person tends to take away resisting power. Of course Katharine could not know that; she could not suspect it.

The hours glided into each other in the most charming way. Every night when Katharine put her head on the

pillow she told herself joyously, "To-morrow will be another day."

Mrs. Llandaff had many moments of contemplating the girl with tender, lingering eyes. Then she would frown and think,

"What a hard-hearted wretch Roxy is! Is not my philosophy better than hers?"

At Nantasket, Llandaff continued to boat, and to drive, and ride, and to play lawn-tennis, and to stroll with Miss Wyckham.

Miss Wyckham often asserted that Nantasket was really vulgar; that the best people never dreamed of coming there. Still, she kept on staying.

Llandaff in those days quite admired himself. He was sure that not by so much as the fluttering of an eyelash did he give sign of how deadly tired he was. He used to look at his companion and imagine how he should be when he had lived with her five, ten, twenty years.

He had asked her to marry him because his judgment had approved. He almost thought now that if he had another life to live in this world he would never perform a single act because his judgment approved.

But a fire is nearly sure in the end to break out.

One morning, Llandaff woke with the sense that this state of things was absolutely intolerable. His first coherent idea was, that if Miss Wyckham should feel to him as he felt to her he should esteem it a gross injustice if she did not tell him, and thus give them both a chance to escape a life-long mistake.

He dressed hurriedly, as if he were going to seek her on the instant. When at last he found himself sitting beside her in her phaeton, he looked at her in secret amazement that he should ever have thought himself brave enough to say what was in his mind.

Nevertheless, he was really a brave man, and he meant to speak those words. There was no way of mildly approaching the subject.

When the ponies had been turned into a lonely road which bent and twisted through Cohasset pastures, the young man suddenly made the statement that he had something particular to say, and that it was very difficult to find words that should express what he had in his mind.

Miss Wyckham turned her calm eyes upon him, and said that he generally was able to find words enough, she had noticed.

It is not a particularly agreeable task for a gentleman to tell a lady to whom he is engaged that, on second thoughts, he finds he does not wish to marry her.

Llandaff gazed helplessly about him.

Then he knit his eyebrows together, very much as a tragic hero on the stage knits his brows. When he became aware of this he felt ridiculous, and immediately unbent his brows.

"The fact is," he burst out, "I'd rather be hanged than say what I must say."

"Then why say it?" placidly inquired the lady.

"Because I must. It isn't fair to you or to me to go on a day longer and not make you the confession of my mistake. I ought not to have asked you to be my wife."

This was certainly explicit. Miss Wyckham's fingers tightened somewhat on the ponies' reins, but not so much that their sensitive mouths felt it.

She remained silent. "It isn't of any use to try to soften the words," began Llandaff again; "there would be the meaning of them just the same, and what good would it do to tell you of my respect and cordial liking and—and—" here he found that his voice failed before the aspect of the woman beside him.

If she only would not behave quite so perfectly, Llandaff felt that his position would be much more endurable. He did not notice her fingers on the reins. He could only see that her face had hardened a little, and that it still seemed to preserve its strictly well-bred look. Miss Wyckham was, indeed, well-bred, and she would have died rather than participate in a scene.

Did this man think that perhaps she was going to plead with him to marry her?

That was the question in her mind as she turned her head and met his eyes, which revealed a great deal of suffering.

"How can you ever forgive me?" he groaned, suddenly extending his hand to take hers.

She drew back very slightly.

"Forgive you, Mr. Llandaff?" in a high, clear voice—"surely you must know that I am as grateful as you can be that you have made this discovery in time."

Here Miss Wyckham reached forward, took the whip, and gently touched the flanks of the off pony.

Llandaff groaned again inarticulately. He wanted to express something, but his ideas seemed to be jumbled up in his brain. He could not construct a sentence. He gave up the attempt and sat in the most abject misery, in which there was not a glimmer of light in the consciousness that he had been obliged to do what he had done.

In another moment Miss Wyckham had pulled in the ponies.

"Is it too much to ask you to walk back, Mr. Llandaff?" she inquired.

The young man sprang out of the carriage almost galvanically. Then he turned back and leaned over the low wheel.

Miss Wyckham's cold eyes did not flinch in their full look at him.

"You will never forgive me!" he cried out sharply. "And yet, surely—surely it was the only thing to do!"

"Certainly, the only thing. Why need we talk further on the subject?"

But Llandaff held the wheel. Miss Wyckham smiled a very little, her lips tightening across her teeth unpleasantly as she did so.

"Mr. Llandaff," she said, "might one ask if Miss North returns your admiration?"

Thus Miss Wyckham revealed that, though well bred, she was not thoroughbred.

Llandaff felt as if that whip had stung him in the face.

He drew back. He lifted his hat and bowed ceremoniously. The ponies darted on. Into the face of their driver there came a crimson color which, when it had subsided, left her quite pale. She was conscious that she had not blushed before for several years.

As for Llandaff, he stood there watching the carriage until it turned a corner.

Then he shook himself, much as a mere animal might shake off fetters. He looked at his watch. Then he jumped over the roadside fence and went at the fastest walk across the pasture towards the hotel.

As he reached one of the entrances he saw Miss Wyckham's ponies being led round to the stables.

When the next boat left for Boston, in spite of all his relief, he was not "enjoying his mind," although he was on board and knew that he had done the only honorable thing, under the circumstances, that there was to do. Still, virtue very frequently is not its own reward, notwithstanding a long-cherished belief to the contrary.

Llandaff knew that if Katharine were to be taken from the world that day, he could never love Miss Wyckham. He knew he had not even imagined he loved her when he had asked her to marry him. There was the bitterness, the unforgivableness, of his mistake. He felt in a way dishonored that he should have done such a thing. Whether he had met Katharine or not, he had no right to offer marriage to a woman because he liked her and believed she would make him the kind of wife of whom he should approve.

That he had seen Katharine, of course, had brought all this home to him with overmastering force; but the fact had been there all the time, ready to spring into disastrous life.

Better now than later, however.

As he sat on the deck of the steamer he wondered if Miss Wyckham had fancied that she loved him. He was sure she had not. He wanted to shiver as he recalled the look in her eyes when she had turned towards him.

Of course she had been angry. Llandaff suddenly stood up and flung his head back as he recalled her mention of Miss North's name.

And at the recollection a rush of other emotion came to him. He went to the railing and leaned over it, following the boat's track intently with vague gaze. He forgot Miss Wyckham. His thoughts ran on to the end of his journey. He felt himself a man free to seek and ask for happiness. Whether he would attain it—that he could not guess. The thraldom of the last few weeks was now so galling in his memory that he wondered how he had endured it. But it had all come through his own fault. It was an episode he would be long in forgetting, one that would sting him to a galling humiliation as long as he lived, he thought.

Mrs. Llandaff was not yet tired of Cap'n Marble's little room under the roof, or of that continuous roar that sounded night and day in her ears. She esteemed it one of the necessities as well as one of the pleasures of her life to give a time to mere existence, when her mind dozed languidly in unison with her body.

She had an old sail stretched upon poles in Cap'n Marble's yard, and in the shadow of this she swung a hammock. Being a woman capable of entire inaction as well as of the most vehement exertion, she would lie completely inert for hours in the hammock, moved only by the wind. Sometimes her eyes were open, oftener they were closed.

Once Katharine, lying on the grass near, offered to read to her.

"Read to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Llandaff. "Child, I wouldn't be read to for the world. I do not intend to have a thought while I'm here. As for you, do what you please. Get acquainted with yourself, for I don't imagine you've ever had much chance to do that."

And the girl did not wish to read, either. She would stroll off upon the solitary beach. In those days the ocean told her strange and beautiful things. She did not think at

all, or it seemed as if she did not. She only lived in that rare and sublimated kind of way which is only permitted to some favored human beings, and only once in their lives to them.

Opening her eyes as she lay in the hammock one day in the third week of their stay at Cap'n Marble's, Mrs. Llandaff's lazy vision saw Katharine far off on the beach, at the place where the shore made a curve to the northward.

Even at that distance Mrs. Llandaff could discern that she was only sitting quietly, looking out to sea, and that she was not troubled.

Katharine's hours of being troubled were very much fewer now.

Mrs. Llandaff, for some reason, half rose from the hammock. She put her feet on the ground, as if she must be ready to start. Then she sat quietly, still gazing at that distant figure of a girl sitting on the sands.

Presently something else came within range of her sight. Of course that something else was a man walking round the curve.

"It is always a man who comes upon a scene like that," was the woman's impatient thought.

She rose and went forward to the edge of the bluff.

She was wondering if Mr. Grove had so far escaped from the clutches of rheumatic fever as to come here. Then she reflected that Mr. Grove could not know where Katharine was. It was only Colburn North who knew Mrs. Llandaff's Boston address, whence letters would be forwarded to her.

No, that was not Marcellus Grove. With a movement quicker than any she had employed since she came to this place, Mrs. Llandaff went to her room and returned with a field-glass.

She levelled it at the two and looked intently through it. After a prolonged gaze she deliberately returned the glass to its case. But she did not go back to the hammock. She sat down in a chair near. There was an intent, concentrated expression on her face.

Out there, where the coast of Maine, having gone as far towards Europe as was possible, changes and dips towards the north, Katharine had almost fallen asleep.

She had slipped downward until her head rested on her arm. She was dreaming, though not soundly sleeping.

She moved in that indefinite way which is characteristic of a sleeper. She thought some one spoke to her. When she thought this she knew she must be soundly sleeping, for there was never any one on the beach; that was the lovely thing about this beach, there was never any one in sight.

Llandaff stood a few yards away looking at her. But he could not allow himself that indulgence, it seemed so unfair. So he pronounced her name.

He had purposely come so that he might have the long tramp round the beach from the north. He hesitated. Then he pronounced her name again. This time she opened her eyes and fixed them upon him.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he said.

She smiled lazily.

"So you aren't a dream?" she asked.

"Stern reality," he responded, his spirits bounding up absurdly. "Prove my assertion. Shake hands with me."

She extended her hand.

She rose hastily to her feet.

"We were not expecting you," she said, thinking she must say something.

"Naturally. I came as suddenly as the wind shifts. Don't say you're sorry," with a quick glance.

"Oh, no; we are—" Here Katharine could not tell whether it would be true to say that they were glad; so she could not say it.

It had been so extremely beautiful without Owen Llandaff that it could hardly be possible it would be quite so beautiful with him. But he would not stay. He would have to go back to that girl to whom he was engaged.

Llandaff looked at her again. Indeed, he found great difficulty in refraining from looking at her. And just at

this moment of his life there came to him a phrase that insistently remained with him.

It was a most annoyingly sentimental phrase. But he could not get rid of it, and was as helpless before it as if he had been a youth of twenty, instead of having almost half a score more of years on his head.

"She is the light of my eyes," were the words that leaped from somewhere at his throat, or, more sentimentally still, at his heart.

The essential meaning of those words settled down with an absorbing power upon his mind. These words were delightful, and they were full of torture.

All through the latter half of his journey from Nantasket his mind had been entirely occupied with this girl.

It might be possible that, when he met her again, some of the glamour would have fallen from his vision. Such a thing as that had happened to him before now. He might have remembered her differently from what she was.

No, he had not. She was standing before him now with that indescribable, ineffable something about her which one human being sometimes has for another human being.

A delicious, poignant sense of the loveliness of life tingled through the young man's consciousness. He immediately set himself to conceal this sense. It seemed to him that the most careless observer, in seeing him, would exclaim,

"Look at him! That fellow's in love."

Making a decided effort, Llandaff moved a step and gave his attention to the ocean, while he remarked that, after that hesitation about saying she was glad to see him, he should always believe absolutely everything she said.

"Oh, Mr. Llandaff," she began, "I know I must seem rude to you. I needn't have begun such a sentence."

"Since you couldn't finish it," turning again to her and now going on rapidly, "I'm so glad to see that you are happier, Miss North. Whatever the cloud was, it has certainly lifted. I knew it would. Do you remember that I prophesied happiness for you?"

"I remember," her eyes falling as she spoke.

She supposed it was this young man's way to have that gentle, yet curiously electric kind of vehemence in his voice when he spoke earnestly. But it was quite impossible to look at him when he spoke thus.

"And the cloud is gone?" he asked in the same tone.

His words seemed to make the cloud come back and spread over her face.

"Forgive me," he almost whispered.

"You need no forgiveness," she answered. "I was thinking that it must be necessary for some people to be under a cloud."

"But not for you, Miss North, not for you."

Llandaff found it impossible to talk in the ordinary way with this girl if he were alone with her. His heart sprang too imperiously to his lips.

Katharine began to walk along the beach.

"There is nothing about me that I should be exempt from suffering," she said.

She wished to reach a more impersonal topic. She began to walk still faster. Somehow it was not easy to think of an impersonal remark.

At last, however, she was able to ask her companion something about his journey, and after that the talk flowed on with perfectly conventional propriety.

Mrs. Llandaff had descended the steps from the bluff to the beach. She walked forward to meet the two.

"I was sure that was you, Owen," she said.

"Naturally you would know me," he responded. "Even Miss North recognized me—after she had wakened. But she couldn't conscientiously say that you and she would be glad to see me. How is it with you, Mrs. Llandaff? Can you give me a drop of comfort?"

"Not a drop. It's atrocious in you, Owen, coming down here now. Do you expect we are going to try to entertain you?"

"I expect nothing. I am abject."

"I'm glad of that. It will do you good to be abject."

Llandaff gazed smilingly at his step-mother. When he smiled like that she knew she could do nothing with him, and that she could not tell what was in his mind.

"I thought, perhaps, I might be able to entertain you and Miss North," he suggested. "You know my capabilities in the way of entertainment. Ought I to rehearse them, that Miss North may be able to judge also?"

He turned towards Katharine as he went on.

"I'm a capital end-man in a minstrel troupe," he said. "I'm really beautiful when I'm blacked. I can dance a clog-dance. I have a lovely tenor voice, and I can accompany myself on a guitar. I can manage a boat; I can—"

Mrs. Llandaff, who had been watching him, now interrupted.

"Owen," she said ruthlessly, "no one cares in the least whether you are entertaining or not."

"Why is it, Miss North," asked the young man, "that the members of one's family are always so unwilling to acknowledge one's talents?"

"How is Miss Wyckham?" inquired Mrs. Llandaff.

"Very well, thank you."

"Perhaps she is coming to Bar Harbor?"

"I think not."

Katharine here began to mount the steps to the top of the bluff. The two did not immediately follow her.

"Owen," said Mrs. Llandaff, "tell me why you are here?" And without waiting for a reply she went on, with some excitement, "And a moment ago, when I saw you before you saw me, you looked happy, dangerously happy. Owen, don't let me distrust you."

XVIII.

OFF THE COAST OF MAINE

LLANDAFF, though he had an appearance of frankness, was often very secretive. At this instant he was in his most secretive mood.

He was still smarting from the humiliation consequent upon that interview with Miss Wyckham. He was not likely to mention that, and the impulse that had driven him to this bit of Maine coast was also an impulse not to be put into words.

The young man stood beside the woman who had just told him that a moment ago he had looked dangerously happy. Just now he seemed remarkably well able to take care of himself, and to achieve what he sought.

"I don't want you to distrust me," he said; "and as for being happy, surely you ought to be glad of that. Haven't I learned from you that happiness is a great object in life? But you need not be anxious lest I enjoy too much. We atoms of humanity are not in any danger of quaffing too deeply of bliss. Now, my dear step-mamma," here the young man put his arm over Mrs. Llandaff's shoulders, "what evil do you suspect me of contemplating? Haven't I been a fairly respectable boy since you knew me?"

The woman smiled as she moved still nearer her companion.

"Perfectly respectable," she answered. "But you must allow me to think that it's odd you left Nantasket, since Miss Wyckham is still there."

Llandaff laughed. But he did not entirely conceal his consciousness that he was now under the scrutiny of very

keen eyes, and of eyes that knew him very well. Still, he felt that he was developing a new phase, and even our most intimate enemy cannot immediately recognize and classify a new phase.

He assumed a little dignity now as he said, –

"Trust me somewhat, Mrs. Llandaff. I am still aware of a sense of honor operating somewhere within me."

"Oh, very well," rejoined Mrs. Llandaff, "if you begin to talk about a sense of honor in that kind of tone I have nothing more to say. Are you going back to-morrow?"

"No."

"You're not going to stay here?"

"I am going to stay here."

"Owen."

"Mrs. Llandaff."

"You'll spoil everything."

"I sha'n't spoil anything. I shall lessen the discomforts and increase the joys of existence here. Try me and see."

Llandaff took off his hat that the sun and air might reach his forehead. He gazed about him with undisguised joyousness, and Mrs. Llandaff looked at him. She was too wise to say anything more. And she already began to be glad he was with her again. She was used to him and deeply attached to him.

Nantasket really was distressingly commonplace; it was no wonder he was tired of it; and then he was extravagantly fond of deep-sea fishing. Why should she continue to be anxious about she knew not what? And it was so wearing, so disagreeable, to be anxious. And Owen was absolutely honorable.

Mrs. Llandaff made a slight motion with her left hand, and with that movement she flung away the indefinite feeling which had come to her at sight of her step-son.

The young man immediately began to demonstrate his devotion to deep-sea fishing. He rose at unearthly hours in the morning and was invisible until noon, when he and Cap'n Marble would appear at the dinner-table in a ravenous state.

At this meal the two men talked continually of the hauls they had made, and of the peculiar manner in which this or that fish had taken the bait; how he had been pulled in; and his weight.

After dinner Llandaff disappeared in his room at a neighboring cottage, and was supposed to sleep until late afternoon.

But even then he did not remain on shore, but went off in a little sail-boat he had hired. His sail could be seen moving this way and that, as the two women sat on the bluff or walked on the beach.

He was burned brown and red, and he lived in a flannel shirt, blue overalls, and rubber boots.

Mrs. Llandaff, completely restored to serenity, wondered that she had ever been disturbed. She said that Owen smelled of fish from every thread of those dreadful clothes, but since he rarely came near the two women it did not matter.

This continued for several days. Then one morning the young man appeared at the breakfast-table in a white suit and russet shoes, having the look of never having smelled of fish in his life.

On being questioned about his former amusement, he said that everything in this world palled, even deep-sea fishing, and he was going to devote himself to his step-mother and her niece.

"Until we also pall upon your highness," remarked Mrs. Llandaff.

"Certainly. But it is the duty of a woman to see to it that she does not pall."

Here he looked at Katharine, who answered,

"We will do our best."

Then the two laughed after the manner of two children.

It was at this meal that Mrs. Llandaff took occasion to ask,

"How is Miss Wyckham, Owen?" And again he answered,

"She is very well, thank you," looking frankly at her as he replied.

But for all his frank look there was a well-defined resentment in the man's mind. Could he not take care of his own affairs? He never felt so able to take care of them as at the present moment. He was free. But he did not know that he needed to proclaim his freedom directly. That was not necessary. There was time enough for that. The sense of that freedom grew more and more exquisite to him.

He lingered near Mrs. Llandaff's hammock after breakfast. He announced that he even felt himself capable of reading poetry aloud.

"You shall not read it to us," was that lady's immediate response. "Go back to Nantasket if you wish to read poetry aloud. I am beyond the age when I can listen, and as for Kate here, she has not yet reached the age."

"Am I the only one who has come to the requisite stage of existence? Are you sure you wouldn't like a short recitation from Byron?"

Llandaff sat down on the ground and leaned against one of the hammock-posts. And he deliberately chose a position where Mrs. Llandaff, in the hammock, could not see him.

He gave himself up to the absorbing occupation of watching Katharine at every instant that he could do so, when she would not be likely to detect him.

As she was entirely unsuspicious, it seemed that detection would not come immediately.

She was sitting in the shade cast by the sail stretched above the hammock. It was quite enough for her, since coming to this place, to sit and look off at the water, sometimes speaking a word or two, sometimes turning the page of a book she held. She was drinking in strength and peace after the long strain upon her. After a little while alertness and activity would return to her. Now she was not vivacious. The hint of languor, and of the memory of suffering, was perhaps one of the strongest attractions she had

for Llandaff. He had never seen a girl in the least like her. Girls were likely to show in some way that they knew he was present. They fluttered, they smiled, they—well, it was not of the slightest consequence what they did. He had forgotten them all.

The wind was constantly blowing one particular lock of Katharine's hair forward over her face, and she was constantly raising her hand to push it back again.

At last Llandaff leaned towards her and said,

"If you would only move a little to the left, the wind would not annoy you so much."

He spoke in the lowest possible tone.

She changed her position as he had suggested.

"I was so stupid not to know that myself," she remarked. She did not notice that she was a little nearer Llandaff, and that if her aunt opened her eyes she could not see her now.

The young man felt like a deep schemer. He resumed his position against the post.

Having now looked at Katharine for some moments, he became possessed by an intense desire to have her look at him.

He made two or three trivial remarks, to which she responded with her glance still out at sea.

He must try something of more apparent importance. And while he had the strongest desire to think of the effective sentence, he found that his mind was in such a confused state that it would not answer to his demand upon it.

He could at least pronounce her name and then trust to luck.

"Miss North," still in that low tone.

She turned towards him in that unsuspecting way in which a wild thing of the woods may walk near the springe set for it. And her eyes were directly caught in his. The mutual gaze lasted but a breath of time before the girl looked off upon the water again. The temptation was

strong upon her to rise and walk away, but some instinct told her that such action would appear to reveal that she thought something unusual was in that meeting of the eyes. She remained quiet and held herself as successfully as if she had been a seasoned woman of the world.

In the meantime Llandaff experienced a decided sensation of disappointment, almost of anger.

He picked up a stone and threw it viciously over the cliff. Notwithstanding his social training, he showed his disturbance while she sat there calmly.

"Miss North," he said again, "I was going to ask if you would like to go out in my boat to-morrow. If you would like it, I'm sure you can persuade Mrs. Llandaff, who hates boats in the most irritating way. She says—"

Here he paused and looked with an unwarranted entreaty at the girl.

He could not understand how it was that she should be more self-possessed than he.

She answered with admirable promptness, not apparently seeing his entreating gaze.

"I wish I could go," she said. "I've been hoping you would ask us—that is, if you should ever stop fishing."

Upon the surface this was an extremely satisfactory reply. Nevertheless, Llandaff was conscious of a keen sense of being defrauded.

"How good you are!" he returned. "If I had known that I would not even have begun fishing; I would have devoted myself to taking you and Mrs. Llandaff in the sail-boat."

"Oh, thank you. That would have been too kind of you."

"Katharine," said a voice from the hammock, "when will you learn never to tell a man he is too kind? Never let him suspect that he is good at all. Men need discipline. They already think too well of themselves."

Here the speaker peeped over the edge of the hammock.

"I think I must have 'lost myself,' as my father used to say when he had been snoring in his chair. What were you two children talking about?"

Katharine quickly took advantage of this opportunity to rise to her feet. She went to the side of the hammock and began gently swinging it.

There was a slight access of heat in her face.

"Mr. Llandaff has been offering to take us in his boat," she said, "and I was telling him that he was too good. Do you think he will be more visibly satisfied with himself because I told him that? Because I can take it back."

"A woman is always taking back things," remarked Llandaff.

"Because a woman is wise enough to be able to change her mind," was Mrs. Llandaff's immediate response.

"Oh, of that kind of wisdom a woman has an infinite amount," returned the young man.

Mrs. Llandaff wondered if Miss Wyckham had availed herself of this feminine privilege. If she had done so, Owen found the experience easy to bear. Mrs. Llandaff was convinced that she did not yet understand everything. And with a woman such a conviction is immediately followed by a resolve that she will understand everything.

"It is a fearful thing to put one's self in a small sail-boat and be splashed with salt water, hit by the sail when the boat turns, generally dealt with in a disrespectful manner by the wind and the ocean, made sick if—"

'Don't say any more, Aunt Kate," interrupted Katharine, "I give up all hope of going."

"Hear me out," went on Mrs. Llandaff; "but I'm more than willing to sacrifice myself for you, Katharine. We will go this moment. There's a film over the sky. Don't tell me the wind isn't the right way. It must be the right way to go somewhere."

Mrs. Llandaff left the hammock with a creditable degree of agility; and after our first youth the getting into or out of a hammock is a dangerous test.

Llandaff went off to the wharf in which Cap'n Marble had a right. But he was in an irritated state of mind, and by the time the little craft was ready to start, and he saw the two women coming down the narrow path that led from the bluff, he was so senselessly, yet acutely, angry that he asked Cap'n Marble if he would take out the ladies, for he, Llandaff, had forgotten something he ought to do immediately.

The Cap'n, who had been bailing and sponging away any evidences of bait in the boat, turned round full on the young man at this.

"I ain't goin'," he said; "I ain't such a blamed fool 's to go out on the water with two women, 'less I'm obleged to go. I'd ruther take out tigers by a great sight. Tigers don't squirm, 'n' yell, 'n' screech, 'n' tip the bo't one way 'n' another; 'n' git sick, 'n' blame you if the wind blows, 'n' blame you wuss if ther's a ca'm. No, I ain't goin' to take out women."

"All right. But I didn't know you'd had such experience with tigers," responded Llandaff, whose good-humor was in some measure restored by the Cap'n's words.

"I ain't had no experience with um. But there can't nothin' be wuss 'n women. There they come now. I own they have showed a little sense about dressin' this time."

Mrs. Llandaff and her niece now approached. They were clad with great severity in long waterproof cloaks and stiff, wide-brimmed hats. On being complimented by the one young man present, as he handed them to their places, Katharine replied that she had put herself unreservedly into her aunt's hands, and she was sure that the result was appropriate if not beautiful.

"Appropriateness is always beautiful," was the sententious reply of Llandaff, as he pushed his oar against the wharf and then let go his sail, which gave its first blow on Mrs. Llandaff's head before she was aware of its swinging forward into place. On being condoled with impetuously

by Owen, she said that the injury was not nearly as great as she had received on former similar occasions, and she was quite sure that she should recover from that before she began to be sea-sick.

She sat down and drew her feet up as if there were a mouse in the bottom of the boat. She directed her niece to do likewise, as one never knew how deep the water would be in a craft like this.

Llandaff sat in the stern with the tiller under one arm, and one hand holding the sheets of the sail until they were out in the wind, sailing straight towards Europe. Then he announced that he could relax his vigilance enough to give himself somewhat to the joys of society.

"You talk, and we will listen," said Katharine, who was finding that she could speak to this man without giving much thought to her words.

"All I want is a listener, and you two can't get away. I will discourse of my adventures, like Othello; or I will prattle sweetly of poetry and music. I will—"

"Let us have the adventures first," interrupted Mrs. Llandaff. "Tell us how you lost your ball when you were eight; how you tried to jump out of the window that time you had the measles and the measles had gone to your head; and how Tim Shores cheated you in a jack-knife trade. Don't keep anything back, Owen."

The whole sky was a smooth lead color. The ocean heaved in long gray swells. The wind blew with gentle steadiness. There was not a bit of brightness anywhere; everything was restful and neutral. Almost immediately the coast began to grow vague and stretched away in an undefined line. But there was no mist.

"It is just like some lives," said Katharine. "It is just as I hope mine will be, gray and uneventful."

She looked at her aunt and seemed to forget that any one else was present. But it was Llandaff who answered.

"There are immense possibilities in a day like this, he said; "as in your life, Miss North."

His face lighted markedly as he found himself addressing Katharine directly.

What if Mrs. Llandaff were there to see him? Had he not cleared the way so that he might allow some expression to the feeling which was rising higher and higher within him? Repression was too painful, and of what use was it?

"No," said Katharine quietly, "there are no possibilities in my life."

She was aware that she had made a mistake in speaking of anything personal, but she had been thinking only of her Aunt Kate as listening to her. Now she was afraid of appearing sentimental, of posing as a sorrow-stricken being. But in some way Llandaff often made a remark that caused her to wish to make a contrary assertion. But what did it matter? Let him think this or that; it could make no difference.

Though the young man had such ample opportunity offered him to be brilliant, he soon became silent, and he refused to be tempted into talk.

He explained that the ocean was too strong for him, that if he spoke it made him seem flippant, and the only way in which he could maintain his self-respect in its presence was to hold his peace.

Mrs. Llandaff asserted that she, for her part, never felt flippant, and that if she had an inclination to talk she should indulge it.

Evidently she had no such inclination, and the party sank into quiet. The water came with a soft rush against the sides of the boat; white wings of birds flashed out sometimes above; or a gull dashed down and flirted the water up about himself. The coast-line looked more and more vague.

In an hour's time Katharine could have recalled her assertion that there were no possibilities in her life. In an hour's time she felt that everything was possible. Her attitude was almost unnaturally still, but there was a differ-

ence in it. Under the steady eyelids a fire was glowing—the fire of young and fervid life and hope; the inextinguishable flame which carries one on to happiness almost against one's own will; the fire of mere living of which the sluggish nature can never even dream.

Llandaff maintained his place in the stern. He was glad no one tried to talk. If no one spoke he would have a better chance to look at that girl there. Perhaps she had forgotten that he was present. No matter. If there were anything in him, any power in—he was gazing so intently at her that he forgot to follow out in coherent words the thoughts in his mind. And besides, words were nothing whatever. Nothing in the world was of the least consequence to him if he could not make this girl look at him—and love him.

How could she help knowing of this flood of emotion which was overwhelming every other emotion in him? To have her know it and respond to it—at the thought of this last possibility Llandaff, under the dominion of something uncontrollable, moved a little towards Katharine.

With that cunning and superficial power of observation which does not desert a lover, he saw that the sail screened them from Mrs. Llandaff.

"Miss North," he whispered.

She turned towards him. At sight of his face her own grew white.

"Oh," in another whisper, "don't you know that I love you? I must tell you! I must tell you!"

She turned away instantly. She put out one hand and grasped the gunwale.

Llandaff knew that she could make no reply, that there was no opportunity.

He felt a wild exultation that he had told her in words.

He began to busy himself with the tiller, then with something in the bottom of the boat. But there was a haze of fire over his vision; he could see nothing distinctly save the face of a girl.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Llandaff's voice from the other side of the sail—"I suppose that we shall have to beat back, Owen?"

Llandaff found it extremely difficult to speak. His voice seemed to have left him. Nevertheless, to his own surprise, it came when he opened his lips.

"Naturally," he answered, "we can't have the wind in our favor both ways, unless it should blow from another quarter.

Mrs. Llandaff moved so that she could see her step-son. But he was again busy with that something in the bottom of the boat. When she was permitted to look at his face she could not find anything in keeping with a certain vibration that had been in his voice as he had just replied to her.

"Doesn't it take a good while to beat back anywhere?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And one gets very tired of it?"

"Yes."

"Then I should think that the sooner you put this craft about the better it would be for all of us. I feel as if we were a great way from Cap'n Marble's."

"Aye, aye. About it is," responded Llandaff.

"Can you tell me," immediately inquired Mrs. Llandaff, "if my niece is still aboard?"

"Yes, Aunt Kate," eagerly replied Katharine; and she went on hurriedly, "do stoop, please, or that sail will hit you again. There it goes! Now, can't you sit by me? The boat will be trimmed all right, won't it, Mr. Llandaff?"

"Yes. But don't let my step-mamma jump up and down, or do any other girlish and exuberant thing."

Mrs. Llandaff placed herself close to Katharine. She remarked that it was bad enough to grow old without being taunted with the fact.

She refrained from looking at the girl. But she was too keenly sensitive not to feel a decided sense of thunder in

the air. She began to talk. She forced Llandaff to rejoin, which he did in the most praiseworthy way.

But all through the hours when they were "beating back" Mrs. Llandaff was becoming more and more angry.

It was dusk when they reached the wharf. The film over the sky had gradually deepened. A slow, sullen rain had begun to drip from the heavens.

The two women walked quickly along the path, leaving Llandaff with the boat.

They went up the steep stairs to the rooms in the roof.

On the top stair, which in the Marble house was called "the flat stair," Katharine was turning to go to her own room. But her aunt seized her arm and drew her up the three remaining steps to her chamber.

"Now," she said, setting her lamp down and looking at Katharine, "what was it that happened on board that boat?"

XIX.

'GUSTY ALLOWS MR. GROVE TO BE SEEN

KATHARINE, standing there beneath her aunt's scrutiny, at first found it impossible to reply, and she felt that she could hardly bear those questioning eyes.

It was not of much satisfaction for her to think that, whatever happened, she was not blameworthy.

"What was said on board that boat?" repeated Mrs. Llandaff with asperity.

Katharine moved suddenly and sat down upon the nearest chair.

She was not thinking of prevaricating in the least. She was only wishing that she had strength to reply.

Mrs. Llandaff was under the dominion of an anxiety so keen that it made her seem harsh. She waited now in silence.

Katharine turned slowly towards her. She bent forward as if the words she was about to say were a weight upon her.

"Mr. Llandaff," she began—she pressed one hand over her eyes; she finished the sentence rapidly—"told me that he loved me; of course he was mistaken."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Llandaff, and she added, with subdued violence, "and I trusted him!"

Katharine made no response. She sat still, with her hand over her eyes.

The woman walked up and down the room a few times. It was extremely disagreeable to be made uncomfortable, and to be made uncomfortable where her affections were so enlisted was worse still. She could not, in this case, throw off the feeling.

At first she was so angry with Owen that she would not allow herself to speak.

She had been right in those fleeting suspicions which had come to her. Such intuitions were never false. Why had she forgotten them?

What was Owen thinking about? Owen!

He must have come down here deliberately. She remembered his face that first day. She ought not to have forgotten that either. But what could she have done? What could she do now?

At this last question she stopped in front of the girl, who was sitting there in the same attitude she had taken a few moments ago.

"Katharine," she said, now speaking gently.

"Yes, Aunt Kate."

But Mrs. Llandaff found that she was unable to ask her the question that had been in her mind. Instead she hesitated, and finally said,

"Go to your room now. We are both tired. We can see things more clearly after a little. Owen must have been insane."

She kissed Kate, and she generously refrained from looking at her.

But when the girl had left her, Mrs. Llandaff resumed the waterproof cloak, which she had thrown from her on her arrival, and went quickly down the stairs again. Her soul was in arms to protect that girl. And she was furious against her step-son. She met him on the cliff path, as she had expected to do.

The rain was still falling, but she did not care for that. She took his arm and turned him round, away from the house, then walked rapidly, keeping her hold upon him.

"I could not see you there without having Cap'n Marble open the door a half-dozen times. And I must speak to you."

Llandaff bowed, and tried to walk as fast as his companion.

The warm rain was driving mildly in their faces. It was quite dark, and the path was uneven. Mrs. Llandaff was obliged to slacken her pace. She was indignant that at such a time as this she should feel an almost irresistible inclination to weep. She wanted to lean against the young man's shoulder and cry.

She could not tell why her anger had gone. And her anger had made her feel strong.

"Owen," she said finally, "I am so disappointed in you."

"I'm sorry for that," he answered with earnestness.

"I knew there was something," she went on, "and I made Katharine tell me what you said. I made her do it. She barely told me. Owen, do you forget Miss Wyckham?"

"I find I'm forgetting her with a great deal of ease."

"But I thought you were a gentleman?"

Llandaff could not restrain a slight movement.

Mrs. Llandaff dropped his arm and walked beside him, still combating that inclination to cry. She was telling herself that she was getting imbecile, since anything should affect her like this.

She became aware that the young man, as well as she, was under the influence of a strong emotion.

He turned to her and took her hand, placing it again within his arm.

"Do you think," he asked quickly, "that a man ought to keep on with an engagement to one woman when he finds he loves another woman? Answer yes or no?"

"No."

"I agree with you. I was worse than a fool—I was something of a knave—when I asked Miss Wyckham to marry me, because I knew I didn't love her. But I liked her, and I thought I would marry. And I didn't love any one else. But now—"

Llandaff paused and unconsciously pressed the hand on his arm more closely to him.

"Surely you will sympathize with me," he continued. "If I never saw Miss North again—if she died to-night—I

couldn't hold to an engagement with Miss Wyckham. My eyes are opened, and I've told her I made a mistake. It was not a pleasant quarter of an hour, you may believe. But I wouldn't willingly see Miss North again until I was a free man."

Llandaff suddenly paused in his walk, and in the dusk turned fully towards Mrs. Llandaff. It was not so dark that she could not see the glow on his face.

"Do you mean that the engagement is broken?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Llandaff restrained the tremor that threatened to seize her.

"And this is not a whim, a fancy?" she asked.

"A whim? I tell you it is love."

Llandaff spoke with sternness.

His companion groaned.

"Oh, of course you think it's love," she said.

He made no answer to this remark.

They went on in silence. Their feet splashed through the puddles in the road, for they had reached the single highway of the village. The rain now increased. The rising tide beat upon the shore below them.

All at once Mrs. Llandaff turned and began to walk rapidly.

"I'm going back to Cap'n Marble's," she said. "I can't talk any more to-night."

Owen kept by her side.

"Won't you give me your good wishes?" he asked. "I tell you I'm more in earnest— But, pshaw!—one doesn't care to hear a young man say such things."

"You always have my good wishes, Owen," she answered falteringly; "but I can't talk any more to-night. Oh, how far we have walked! and how it rains!"

She hurried until she almost ran. She wanted to think. But what good would thinking do?

And would that rheumatic fever carry off Marcellus Grove? And would Roxy ever be punished? And she must tell

Owen to-morrow. And could Grove be made to "get a bill."

So she hastened into the house and up the stairs. But here she came softly and paused on that "flat stair," listening for any movement from Katharine. But she heard nothing.

She hoped that the morrow's daylight would bring illumination to her mind as well as to her eyes.

Certainly Kate would sleep. Young people always slept. But as for her—she dreaded the long, continuing dark hours. And she had come here to rest.

It was such a miserable thing to be able to feel anything. There was Roxy now—that was the way to be made.

Mrs. Llandaff lay on her bed, wearily asking herself what was to be done.

She thought it was strange that, pellucid as Katharine's character seemed to her, she yet had not been able to guess in just what way the girl's heart had received Owen's confession. Certainly she had been moved. That, under the circumstances, was unavoidable.

Whether Katharine cared or not, she must be released from that bond which any moment might make unendurable.

Mrs. Llandaff found that she had been unconsciously depending somewhat upon that rheumatic fever. She smiled rather grimly at this thought.

Cap'n Marble was always up by daylight in summer. Although there was usually nothing to call him up, he would have deemed himself hopelessly "shif'less" if he had slept after that first morning dusk had given way to light.

But he was speechless with surprise when, as he emerged from his bedroom the next morning, he came upon Mrs. Llandaff, fully dressed, just entering the kitchen.

"I want that man who owns a horse," she said. "Do you think I can get him to take me to the station? I must send a message."

Cap'n Marble expressed it as his opinion that the man

who owned a horse would do anything under the canopy if he was only paid enough; and he advised Mrs. Llandaff to go herself, which Mrs. Llandaff did without a moment's delay.

She stood and watched the man lead out the horse from its stall. She pleaded with him not to curry the animal; she couldn't wait. She was obliged to plead so hard that she had a feeling afterwards as if she had hung around his neck in her earnestness, and she hated the man accordingly.

Still, in spite of all, the time did come when she was in the corner of the railroad station and was writing a line to Colburn North, which the man assured her he would "send right along." Now she gave North her address.

Therefore, the first that Mr. North heard in any way after that hurried visit by Katharine and her aunt was this telegram.

He was grateful that he had been at the village on its arrival, and so had prevented its being received at his home and under Roxy's eye. But he supposed that Roxy must see it. She had to see everything.

"It is absolutely imperative that the child be released," was what Mrs. Llandaff had written for the operator.

Mr. North read these words once on the spot where the messenger had found him.

They moved him so that he could hardly reply to an acquaintance who saw him receive the yellow envelope, and who stood round watching until the enclosure had been read and then asked,

"No bad news, North, I hope?"

"Nobody's dead," was the short answer.

Then Mr. North hurried to get into his wagon, where he might read the message again.

Something had occurred to make Katharine send that. He always thought of Mrs. Llandaff as Katharine.

Was the child borne to the ground by her burden?

Mr. North's heart burned as he kept his eyes on the bit

of paper, while his horse walked zigzag along the road, cropping a mouthful of leaves on this side and on that.

But after a few moments the reins were gathered up, and the horse was turned round the corner, with his head towards the residence of Deacon Grove.

Deacon Grove's housekeeper was in the back-yard, laboriously spreading some sheets to whiten on the grass. Being fat and unwieldy, she seemed to be constantly doing something which called for a stooping position.

She was surprised to see Mr. North drive into the yard. Though he had brought his wife to the house several times since the deacon's illness, he had always stopped outside and then driven right on.

Now he left his wagon and came across the grass.

Mrs. Morse took up another sheet and began to shake it out with a great flapping noise.

"How's Grove this morning?" asked Mr. North in a voice loud enough to drown the other sound.

Mrs. Morse appeared to have a pin in her mouth, which she was obliged to remove before she could reply dismally that the deacon had had an awful bad night.

"Is he really better or worse?" impatiently demanded the man.

The woman shook her head. She said the doctor said complications were setting in. The doctor was going to fight the complications, but Mrs. Morse didn't think the doctor had much hope.

"Well, I've got to see him," remarked Mr. North. "If he's able to talk to me he will; if he isn't—why, he can't."

He turned towards the house.

But Mrs. Morse cried out, "Oh, 'Gusty won't let you see him, I don't believe. 'Gusty says he's a very sick man."

Mr. North could not refrain from stamping his foot on the ground.

"Where is 'Gusty?" he asked.

"She was here a minute ago—said she'd got to have a breath of fresh air if she expected to hold out. Mis' Budd

was settin' with him for a spell. How's your wife, Mr. North? I heard she wa'n't well. She ain't looked well lately. Mis' Budd's mother said your wife seemed to her like a woman 't had begun to fail."

"She hasn't been as well as usual. Isn't that 'Gusty?" as a woman came out of the porch, being very careful not to let the screen-door bang behind her.

"Yes, that's her."

Mr. North advanced so suddenly that Miss Riddle jumped a little. Then she laughed.

"You 'most startled me, Mr. North. How's your wife? I hope she ain't failin'. Somebody was tellin' that they thought she'd begun to fail or was goin' to fail."

Again Mr. North answered that Roxy wasn't as well as usual, and then he said, "'Gusty, I want you to let me see Grove a few minutes. It's an important matter. It's really necessary."

'Gusty laughed. Then she held up her hands and said that the deacon was a very sick man. She didn't know as she could resk it. The doctor was afraid of complications. If she should let anybody see him, and then the complications should set in—

But 'Gusty was good-natured; as she said, she liked to be "'commydating," and she was always pleased when she had charge of any one and could "let people in." She liked to let people in. She would much rather do that than to keep them out.

Now she hesitated and laughed, and said she hoped Mr. North wouldn't excite the deacon, for excitement might help bring on the complications; but she guessed he might see the deacon "jest a few minutes, 's soon 's Mis' Budd come out."

'Gusty preferred to be present herself at the interview, rather than to have Mrs. Budd enjoy that privilege.

When Mr. North had followed Miss Riddle into the house, and while he was waiting the advent of Mrs. Budd, he was wishing he could run away and never hear of Mar-

cellus Grove or of Roxy Hillard again. He found of late that he was thinking of his wife as Roxy Hillard.

It was true that she wasn't well. She said she didn't know as anything especial ailed her, but she asserted that "when she set down she didn't want to git up, 'n' when she did git up she wanted to set right down. And victuals was jest like so much sawdust."

This from a woman to whom victuals were not usually in the least like sawdust was alarming.

Colburn suggested a doctor, but Roxy preferred some bitters for the blood. She said she knew her blood needed "thinning down." She had been convinced since that time when her head had felt so queer that her blood was too thick, and when blood is too thick it is evident enough that it must be thinned.

Mr. North, as he sat in Deacon Grove's kitchen waiting for Mrs. Budd, thought confusedly and dejectedly of all this. And he thought of how he had told his wife that he shouldn't call to see Grove, and of how he, North, had pushed Grove into the water and should be responsible if he died.

With this thought there came for an instant a terrible exultation that then Katharine—his Kitty—would be free. Why should he begrudge the price, even though it were such a price, so that his daughter might be happy again?

And what had made Mrs. Llandaff send such a telegram? What new thing had happened? Surely Katharine could not be already fancying that she loved some one.

Mr. North was dreading that. Everything was horrible that day to the man as he sat there.

He knew that 'Gusty Riddle was talking; the words she said rolled over his mind without leaving the least idea behind them.

But he did rouse when some one was heard on the stairs, and he comprehended that Miss Riddle said that that was Mis' Budd.

'Gusty hastened out of the room "to prepare the deacon,"

she said, and Mr. North was left a few moments to try to listen to Mrs. Budd's mournful prophecies concerning the patient in the spare chamber. She said Deacon Grove's countenance wa'n't right. She thought his nose was going to be pinched in, and she was sure she had heard a dog howl the night before. There was also a ticking in the wall as she had sat by the bed just now. She thought it might be a death-watch. She had asked Deacon Grove if he thought it was a death-watch.

Mr. North smiled as he inquired,

"What did Grove say?"

"I don't wish to repeat what he said," was the answer. "I 'spose it's nat'ral for men to swear when they are sick."

When 'Gusty summoned Mr. North he plucked at her sleeve on the stairs and inquired if it were absolutely necessary that she be present at the interview, for he had something very confidential to say to the deacon.

'Gusty said she certainly would be obliged to be present, but that she would go to the other side of the room and try not to listen.

At this Mr. North tried not to groan. He compromised by laughing so loud that he was immediately hushed by his companion.

He was startled by seeing Grove look so very ill, but the voice which greeted him was not alarmingly weak.

"Well, North, what infernal thing's up now?" asked the deacon, looking as if he would gnash rabidly at whatever came in his way.

North replied to the point and directly,

"I came to talk about your getting a bill, Grove, and you've got to listen to me. The whole thing's outrageous, you know. Public opinion 'll be all against you if you hold out. You'll be tarred and feathered when it's known that you're really intending to keep that child to that bond. I tell you I know what I'm talking about. Ask anybody. You just let me begin proceedings in your name. Desertion, you know, and all that. It'll be a mere form. Your peti-

tion 'll be granted directly, and then the whole affair 'll be almost as if it never had been, and you can marry again. You're a man that seems to need a wife."

While North talked the sick man was moving his head impatiently from side to side, and occasionally trying to look intently at the speaker.

As soon as he could he said crossly that he didn't want to be bothered, and he wished North would talk of something else if he must talk.

Here 'Gusty advanced from the other side of the room, where she had been trying not to listen, and gave a few pats to the deacon's pillow. Then she went back to her former position. And she endeavored to look as if she were not interested and had succeeded in not listening.

"I've got to talk of this, Grove," responded Mr. North with firmness, "and everybody 'll be talking if you don't take my advice. Can't you see for yourself?"

The deacon moved his head yet more impatiently. "What do I care what folks say?" he snarled.

But evidently he did care. He writhed as he lay there. Mr. North felt that he would not regret it if he did take an unfair advantage. He must take any advantage he could get.

He wished that he could forget that he had pushed Mr. Grove into the water. It was just like Grove to get a fever and ruin the effect of having been pulled out.

Mr. North was conscious that a morbid impulse to tell Grove that he had pushed him off the wharf was rising in his mind and becoming stronger and stronger. He hoped that he shouldn't yield to such an impulse. He didn't feel quite convinced in these days that he could trust himself about anything.

It was quite dreadful to Mr. North to be aware, as he stood by the bed, that he was not really sure that he wanted the man to recover. It would simplify matters so very much if he died. If he died, then he, North, would do the best he could to bear his guilt. There was always that beam

in his barn, and always a rope might be hitched to it and then to his own neck.

Roxy would make an excellent, thrifty widow. That is, if she should be successful in thinning down her blood, and getting so that she would again enjoy her victuals. But his Kitty would grieve.

At that thought he looked again at the face on the pillow. He did not think that Marcellus Grove was going to die. He didn't have the appearance of a man near death.

"You'd better let me set 'Squire Ladd at work on this," said Mr. North urgently. "You don't want the neighbors hooting at you."

"I wish you'd stop," cried the deacon, almost crying. "I don't know but I'll think about it. Of course, I'm not going to be mean. You come again in a few days, and I'll give you an answer. I sha'n't hold out if it ain't going to be the right thing."

"Of course you won't," quickly rejoined Mr. North. "I'll come Tuesday. And you'll be a free man if you say so, and can marry again."

Mr. North turned away. Miss Riddle advanced and again patted the sick man's pillow. As she lifted her head she met Mr. North's eyes. She followed him outside the door.

"'Gusty," said Mr. North beseechingly, "you must have a good deal of influence with him," his words accompanied by a motion towards the room he had just left. "Can't you make him see that it'll be best all round to get a bill? It's plain he depends so on you." Here this astute individual paused tentatively.

'Gusty laughed gently under her breath. She almost thought she was blushing. She hurriedly pulled her handkerchief from the pocket of her white apron and passed it over her face.

"I think it's the deacon's duty to git a bill," she responded. "I shall use what little influence I have. But he's a very sick man. Mebbe he's goin' where there ain't no marryin' nor givin' in marriage."

"P'r'aps he's goin' there some time," said Mr. North, "but he isn't goin' at present. He'll pull through this."

And Mr. North went away elated and hopeful. He was sure he had touched the right chord in that creature's heart. And Grove would see how devoted and necessary 'Gusty was. He'd be a good while getting about, even when he began to mend, and then would be 'Gusty's opportunity.

"If only she does not laugh too much," was Mr. North's thought, as he drove homeward in better spirits than he had thought he ever should know again.

But he did not go directly home. He was impatient to let his daughter know that illness made a difference with Grove.

So he went round by the railroad station and sent a telegram to Mrs. Llandaff. He tried to make it carry the precise state of things, but he could explain nothing, and after he had written, "Have seen him. Am sanguine that she will be released," he immediately began to be afraid that he had sent a too-hopeful message. By the time he was in sight of his home his spirits had fallen again. Had he been too much elated by the varying mood of a sick man? Because Grove had been so stubborn in his refusal before, did he think too much of this apparent change?

But the message had gone. Mr. North did not allow the telegram from Mrs. Llandaff to remain in his coat pocket. He thought it was more than he could bear to hear Roxy's comments upon it. Roxy said no child of hers should ever have a bill if she could help it. But there were things of late that Roxy could not prevent. It was, perhaps, a realization of this fact which caused Mrs. North to think her blood needed thinning down.

Mr. North left the telegram in a safe place in the barn, and he kept perfect silence regarding it and his visit to Deacon Grove.

He looked with a furtive keenness at his wife as he sat down at the table opposite her. He wondered if she were really "going to fail."

He saw that her face was gray, and it seemed to have grown long. She ate very little. She hardly spoke. It was not cheerful at the North house. But Mrs. North carefully cooked the kinds of food her husband liked. She neglected nothing.

On that bluff on the Maine coast Mrs. Llandaff was waiting for an answer to her message. She felt that she could not even see Owen until she could hear, and she could not hear before night, for the word must be brought from the office by a man, and a man was certain not to hurry his horse.

Llandaff took himself away fishing. And Katharine's face and manner were quiet and unsuggestive.

But then Mrs. Llandaff could not be said to know what Katharine's face was like, for she hardly looked at the girl.

The rain came persistently down all the day.

Worn out with its calm patter on the roof, at five o'clock Mrs. Llandaff again put on her cloak and walked alone along the road that led to the telegraph office.

In half an hour she met the messenger and had Mr. North's hopeful line in her hand.

"Now I'll allow myself to breathe," she thought.

As she raised her eyes from the paper she saw Katharine coming towards her.

XX.

A CHANCE FOR 'GUSTY

The girl, in her dark waterproof and close black hat, had the appearance of a young ascetic as Mrs. Llandaff first saw her slowly approaching through the thick rain. It seemed to rain all the time now.

Katharine smiled at sight of her aunt.

"I thought Mrs. Marble was going to have a turn," she remarked; "and as Cap'n Marble thought so, too, I was sure I should be happier somewhere else. But I almost think she doesn't really have turns, and that the Cap'n wants us to think she has them. What is your opinion, Aunt Kate?"

She turned and put herself in step with her companion, who replied carelessly,

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure."

Katharine had spoken so naturally that Mrs. Llandaff felt almost aggrieved that she could not guess with more accuracy at her feelings.

And Mrs. Llandaff's mind was now full of the thoughts suggested by the telegram she had just received. She was a woman who acted much upon impulse. She would say that she was just as likely to do the right thing on the spur of the moment as after she had spent hours in consideration. Now she drew the bit of paper from beneath her cloak and extended it.

"Let us rejoice!" she said gayly. "That nominal marriage will soon be not even nominal. If the deacon dies you are free, and if he gets well you are free."

She waited a moment to let Katharine take in the meaning of the words her father had sent.

The girl lifted her face slowly.

"If that man gets what they call a bill, I shall be a divorced woman, I suppose?" she said.

"Certainly—in the eyes of the law. But the main point would be that you would then be as free as if you had never been Mrs. Grove."

Katharine said nothing for a time, while the two walked over the drenched roads.

"Well?" exclaimed Mrs. Llandaff, a little impatiently.

"Oh," returned Katharine, with a somewhat desolate face, "I have nothing to say. Only I always thought a dīvorced woman was a disgraced creature."

She shuddered.

"Nonsense!" responded Mrs. Llandaff. "You've got that idea from your mother. It all depends— This affair, now —it is inexpressibly unfortunate, but there's not a shadow of disgrace about it."

Here she glanced at the girl; she could not see her face, but she felt some sort of antagonism, she knew not what it was. And this feeling angered her.

"Katharine," she said, "haven't you any sense—any discrimination?"

"It always seemed like a disgrace," said Katharine again.

She was looking forlornly ahead into the thick rain.

Mrs. Llandaff exclaimed in indignation. She thought of Roxy. Could it, after all, be possible that Roxy had transmitted any of her traits to her daughter? But if it were so, would it not be natural?

"Do you mean," began Mrs. Llandaff, "that you would not try to be divorced?"

"Oh, no. I want to be. I want to be free. Only I was wondering if I would ever feel free in my mind again, just as if that had never happened."

The woman laughed in a relieved manner.

"Oh, you ignorant child!" she cried; "how little you know of the power of youth and of the years!"

She wondered if Katharine would not volunteer some word about Llandaff. She waited for her to do so. But no word was spoken.

In the little front entry of Cap'n Marble's house, where the two took off their rain cloaks, Mrs. Llandaff said in her gentlest way,

"My dear, don't criticise good-fortune. And don't drive away happiness if happiness ever comes to your door."

She had put her arm over the girl's shoulders as she spoke.

Katharine did not look up. There was a slight quiver of her frame beneath her aunt's touch.

"You have been such a happiness to me, Aunt Kate," she said in an unsteady voice.

"That's a lovely thing to tell me," was the response. "I hope you'll always think so."

The girl turned away with some abruptness and hurried up the stairs to her own room.

She sat by the window and gazed absently at the smooth gray of the dripping heavens. And as she gazed the clouds parted suddenly and rolled away, leaving a dazzling space of blue wherein the sun quickly shone with blinding splendor.

As if impelled by some power from the sun itself the girl rose. She flung open the window and leaned out as if to greet a beloved friend.

She felt as if she had never before been so thankful for the sunlight. She almost believed in it as in an omen of good.

There was a step on the grass below. Mechanically she turned her eyes in the direction of the sound.

Llandaff looked up with bared head.

"I thought you were out," he said with eager quickness. "See how it is clearing. The ocean is magnificent. Won't you come down and look at it?"

Katharine did not reply immediately. Then she said,

"Yes, I will come."

A moment later she had joined the young man, and they were walking down the steps to the beach below.

Perhaps Katharine did not think how he must interpret her acceding to his request after what he had said on the sail-boat. Or if she did think, she was willing that her action should be so interpreted.

She walked on without seeming to be aware of Llandaff's presence. She was evidently possessed by some thought so that she was perfectly removed from self-consciousness.

Her companion walked silently. He had hardly dared to glance at her. The joy he had experienced because she had consented to join him for some reason quickly left him. It appeared that she was a long way from him.

It occurred to him that at the first opportunity, as soon as he felt himself allowed to speak, he must explain that he was no longer engaged to Miss Wyckham.

He wondered if she were thinking of that engagement and was believing him to be dishonorable. He wanted to tell her that he was not dishonorable in that way, at least.

He looked at her again and was afraid she was not thinking of him in any way—which was worst of all.

When he had borne this as long as it seemed to him possible, he exclaimed abruptly, "Miss North, I can't endure that you should think wrongly of me. I must tell you that my engagement to Miss Wyckham is broken—that, indeed, it should never have been made. It was a wretched mistake. I was free to speak to you as I spoke on the boat. I had to speak. I was hardly master of myself."

While he went on thus Katharine had been walking faster and faster.

Now, without looking at him, she said,

"It makes no difference." Then she repeated with a kind of sharp insistence, "It doesn't make the least difference."

Llandaff felt as if his face stiffened in his effort to preserve an appearance of composure.

He hurried on beside her. It was some moments before he said,

"Then I cannot hope for anything? You cannot love me?"

"Certainly you cannot hope for anything in regard to me," she answered with a prompt hardness that did not seem like her, or rather like his idea of her.

He drew himself up with that involuntary physical movement which one makes when receiving an intangible blow.

If she had not been so hard and so prompt he would have said something, he knew not what. As it was, he could not at first speak a word. He knew he ought to walk away. But he could not quite bring himself to go immediately. He kept on by her side. He was aware of a pitiably weak and unmanly inclination, which in a woman might have led to tears. But tears did not come to him. There was a sense as if he would suddenly take to bleeding inwardly; as if life were worthless; so intense and so hopeless was the quick devastation that came to him. Of course, in his own eyes he was the only youth in the world who had ever really suffered because of a woman.

He had not supposed that he had any reason for hoping, but now he knew that he must have hoped, and strongly.

Really he must not keep on by her side in this way. He must be making himself very disagreeable, and she was almost running away from him.

"I'm sorry I have annoyed you," he began. "But I'm sure you are kind enough to forgive me. I won't stay here. I will go away immediately. Perhaps you'll shake hands with me, and—" here a slight pause—"and you'll forget me so soon that I need not be afraid that I have made you unhappy in the least. You'll shake hands with me, won't you?"

He was not fully conscious of what he was saying. His consciousness was filled with the fact that she did not love him, and that he was leaving her.

At this second appeal that she should give him her hand in good-by, Katharine stopped her walk. She turned towards him, not giving him her hand, however, and not even looking at him.

"Mr. Llandaff," she began quickly, "I said it did not make the least difference whether you were engaged or not." She paused; she breathed deeply; she clasped her hands before her. Then her speech dashed impetuously on, as if what she wished to say were a thing which controlled her, rather than that she controlled it.

"I did not mean that I did not love you."

Llandaff's face flashed out. She shrank farther away from him.

"I could not say that, for I do love you," she went on. "I wanted to tell you. Perhaps I ought not. I don't know. I find there are so many things I don't know. Now, good-by, Mr. Llandaff."

This time she extended her hand. But he did not take it. He did not even see it.

"No, no!" he cried, though hardly speaking above a whisper, "not good-by now—now, when—oh, Miss North!—"

Here the man's voice entirely failed him. The revulsion from misery to such happiness was too great. He made a step nearer her, but she kept aloof.

A thousand hot, swift words rushed up to Llandaff's lips, but he could not speak one of them.

"Life is very bewildering," went on Katharine, keeping her eyes lowered. "It seems now as if I ought not to have told you; as if—but I am so ignorant, Mr. Llandaff, and I have suffered so much that sometimes I'm afraid I don't see things in the right way. But—" Here she raised her eyes for an instant to his face, and her steady voice faltered. She continued, "You seemed to suffer. I could not bear to see you suffer. And I love you. I wanted to tell you so—I wanted to comfort you. I feel as if I had the capability to suffer enough for both of us." She smiled pathetically. "And now, really, it must be good-by."

Llandaff had a frantic sense that he was in a nightmare from which he could not waken, or that he was struggling fruitlessly against the inevitable.

But this sense was mercifully tempered by that exquisite confession she had made him. He thought no other woman in the world would have made that confession just as she had done. He stood there before her almost trembling with the excess of his joy and his dread.

"Not good-by," he said with some imperiousness. "Of all times in our lives this is not the time to say good-by."

She seemed able to look at him now with an approach to steady calmness.

"Of all times this is the time," she returned, "and now let us say it. You said you were going away."

"I said that before I knew that—before you told me —before—"

The man stopped suddenly, feeling too keenly for speech the ineffable sweetness of what she had said. Then he broke out,

"But I can't go now. You have made it impossible. Do you think it is in mortal man to leave such happiness behind him?"

She turned away with a gesture which forbade him to follow. He obeyed and stood watching her. In a moment she paused in her hurried walk, looked back, and said,

"Mr. Llandaff, you may think me a strange woman. There are some things I can't talk about with you. Will you ask my Aunt Kate?"

She went on along the beach and away from the direction of Cap'n Marble's.

Llandaff remained a moment looking at her. There was upon him a maddening sense of the intolerable. And yet it is an inexorable law that often in this life even the intolerable must be borne.

The young man turned and went back to the house. The sun was shining in full glory now. Even the puddles in

the ground under where Mrs. Llandaff's hammock hung in fair weather reflected back this brilliance.

When he had mounted the steps that led from the beach Llandaff paused and tried to recover a little self-command. It was at once the most happy and the most miserable moment of his life. But happiness more and more overrode misery.

What insuperable obstacle could there be between him and Katharine North?

Since she loved him it was absurdly impossible that there should be anything. In such a case as this there was nothing insuperable, nothing that he could not overcome.

But he was impatient. He lingered on the bluff, seeing that figure on the beach growing smaller as it went farther and farther away.

"How the sunlight streams over everything," said Mrs. Llandaff's voice from the other side of the screen-door just behind him.

"I want to see you," said Llandaff, not taking his eyes from the woman on the beach.

"To see me you must look at me," was the response.

"Come out here," brusquely; "I can't have those Marbles anywhere within half a mile."

Mrs. Llandaff did not wait. She stepped down and took his arm, glancing keenly in his face as she did so.

"Oh, dear!" she groaned, "I'm afraid I sha'n't have any more rest on this shore. What are you going to say to me?"

He waited until he had conducted her to the beach below. Then he unceremoniously dropped her hand from his arm.

"Miss North told me to ask you. She said there were some things she could not talk about with me. She said she loved me, but that we must say good-by. Now, what does she mean? What notion has she taken about some

duty that ought to separate us? Because, Mrs. Llandaff, let me tell you that I most assuredly don't mean to be separated from her."

Mrs. Llandaff's mind again shrank from anything disagreeable, but she tried to brace herself to meet it.

"I don't know whether you will call it a notion or not," she answered sharply, "but the truth is that Katharine is already married in a way."

The young man was silent for so long that Mrs. Llandaff looked at him, though she had resolved not to do so at present.

His face was quite blank. She took his hand in both of hers.

"I said, in a way," she repeated, and even in her trouble she could not refrain from smiling at the absurdity of her phrase.

He withdrew his hand with a harsh movement. He put it over his face for an instant. Then he said, almost in his usual tone,

"I don't know what you mean by 'in a way.' Either she is married or she isn't. And why didn't you tell me? Mrs. Llandaff, with all your kindness, you are a cruel woman — a cruel woman. It would be well for Miss North — for that girl — if she were not in your care."

At first Mrs. Llandaff's eyes flashed angrily. Then they suffused and her face softened.

"I am sorry she loves you. You could bear it well enough— Oh, I am so sorry she loves you!" she exclaimed.

After a silence, during which Llandaff was watching that now far-off figure on the glittering beach, Mrs. Llandaff spoke again.

"But let me tell you. Remember you were engaged to Miss Wyckham. You were safe. And would you have me placard Katharine as if it were every one's business to know all about her? When I have told you the miserable

little story perhaps you won't blame me so much, and perhaps you won't be so hopeless. Owen, I can't bear to see your face like that."

She pressed nearer to him, but he did not notice her. He was still looking at that figure on the beach.

Mrs. Llandaff was beginning to feel impatient because she was suffering.

"Let me tell you," she said again.

"You may tell me," he returned, "but if she is married there is no explaining that fact away."

She went on hurriedly. She finished by speaking of the telegram Mr. North had just sent her.

"And who knows but that a kind Providence may use this rheumatic fever as a means of removing Mr. Grove?"

She ended with this question.

She sat down on the lowest step of the stairs. She motioned for Llandaff to sit beside her, but he shook his head.

"You must not suffer like that," she exclaimed. "Don't you see that it's almost sure he'll get a bill, if he doesn't do better and die?"

"How blind you are!" violently cried Llandaff. It seemed a relief to him to speak thus violently. He was aware of a sudden desire to rave in the most melodramatic manner. And he was impelled to blame that woman who sat there, and who gazed at him so deprecatingly. It was quite unbearable if he could not blame somebody.

"Can't you see," he went on, "that she isn't the kind of a woman who marries again after a divorce? Some might go on indefinitely that way, but not she. Look at her face. She is too refined, too sensitive. Oh, what infernal fortune let her do such a thing? I swear I won't have it so! I can't have it so!"

He had suddenly yielded to the excitement upon him. He strode up and down on the sands as if he were caged within a certain space. He must fight. But how should he fight, and with whom?

Only for a moment did he yield, however. He was too genuinely civilized to go on in that manner. As suddenly as he had given way he resumed his self-control. Only his eyes held their despondent fury. He sat down by Mrs. Llandaff's side.

"It is, perhaps, a matter to be borne," he said with perfect quiet.

"Dear Owen," murmured his step-mother, "rave if you must, but don't look like that; please don't."

Owen made no response. For some reason there was something rasping just now in this woman's presence. He wondered how she could speak in that way about Katharine's being divorced. He wondered how she could speak about it at all. It was a matter that must not be discussed. Still, to his utmost astonishment, he straightway fell to discussing it in his own mind, and to telling himself that the divorce was something that must be effected. It must. She must be free. There was no question of his own future in that question of her freedom. It was of no consequence about his future. But Katharine's—

"Mrs. Llandaff," he said, "are you really to be trusted to do the best for her?"

"I love her well enough," was the answer.

"Oh, that isn't enough!" he answered with some impatience. "I've got to trust her to you. I've got to go away somewhere. I haven't the least idea where, and it makes no difference. I shall not see her again. I wouldn't trust myself to see her again. In some overwhelming moment I might plead with her to run away with me. If I ever did that I should shoot myself in my remorse. I know how she would look at me."

He rose.

"I'm going this moment." He bent down over his companion and seized her hands. "Think what I have to leave with you," he said tremulously. "Are you sure you know how to deal wisely with her? She must not suffer much more. She said—" here he paused and drew back. He

could not repeat that she had said she could suffer enough for both.

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Llandaff; "and, Owen, don't despair. And, above all things, don't go so far that I cannot find you if I need you."

He made no audible response. He walked on along the beach in an opposite direction from that taken by Katharine.

And Mrs. Llandaff, still sitting there, found her thoughts revert to her sister Roxy.

This was Roxy's work and the outcome of Roxy's work.

Then Mrs. Llandaff's mind went back again, as it had often done since she had known Katharine, to her own early days when she had lived with Roxy; and her face hardened as she thought.

Meanwhile, in Feeding Hills, this same Roxy was not happy. Perhaps I ought to say rather that she was not comfortable, for she was not the kind of human being who could know what happiness might be like, save her kind of happiness, which was of decidedly a material description.

She had never quite put out of her thoughts the idea of that concealed razor. She had times of watching her husband in a furtive way, to see if he put his hand to his pocket in any suggestive manner.

She felt that Colburn was changed. She could not define the change, but it was very marked. Two or three times she spoke to him about this difference, and she expressed a hope that he was repenting of having pushed Deacon Grove into the water. She even said that she thought it would be a good idea to "put up a note" the next Sabbath, requesting prayers for one who had committed a sin and who was repentant. She did not consider that it would be necessary to specify the exact sin or the exact person. She had a good deal of faith in the efficacy of putting up a note.

When she made the above suggestion to her husband, he stared at her in helpless silence for a moment. Then he

said he guessed he wasn't so far gone yet as to put up a note for any such thing as that. Besides (here came over his face an expression which immediately suggested that razor to his wife), he didn't know, he wasn't at all sure, that he was repentant. He hadn't yet made up his mind whether he was glad or sorry that he had pushed that fellow in.

It was just like the conceited jackass to go and have a fever. How was the man, anyway? Roxy had been over that day, how did she find him?

It was in this way that Mr. North talked. It was not to be wondered at that Mrs. North was bewildered, and that even she, considering all things, failed to "relish her victuals." She did more than that—she gradually failed to do all her daily work, and there was a falling off in the quality of her butter. The store-keeper in Feeding Hills, the one who had the opposition store to Deacon Grove, complained that the buttermilk wasn't all worked out. And it was a fact that it was not. When Colburn told her of this Roxy looked almost as if she were going to cry.

"I'm sure I d' know what's the matter of me," she said.

Her husband gazed at her with a cold and yet anxious scrutiny. Was she really "failing," as the neighbors had suggested?

She left more and more of her duties undone. Mr. North was obliged to have a woman come in and "do up the work" every morning. Roxy would sit in that rocker of hers and swing slowly back and forth, watching the woman go about the room.

It began to be rumored still more strongly in the neighborhood that North's wife was really failing. There were some who asserted that Roxy had had a "shockernumpalsy." This word, being interpreted, is shock of numb palsy. This is a disease which seemed to be very little understood, but which was much admired, if I may say so, as being extremely mysterious and averse to yielding to any treatment.

There were others who almost violently stated that it was

not numb palsy, though they admitted it was "something gradual." And others still spoke of Mrs. North as suffering from some "inward trouble," possibly meaning that it was not a cutaneous affection.

Mrs. North herself had no theory as to the cause of her indisposition beyond that idea that it was occasioned by the thickening up of her blood. She was dimly aware that all of her attempts to thin down her blood had apparently been unsuccessful.

She sat in her chair and knew that the bitters she had made and taken had been of no avail.

She had given up the bitters. The doctor came now once in a few days. He was just as cheerful as he was in other cases, and sniffed gayly at the medicines he compounded for her. He declined to state what her ailment was, but he did not say that the reason for his not so stating was because he did not know what it was.

It was indescribably dreary at the North house. Mr. North went through his routine of farm and town work more rigidly than ever. He dreaded to go into the house and see his wife sitting there. He had accesses of the wildest longing to run away to the ends of the earth.

Acting upon a well-defined resolve, he did not mention his daughter's name. Once Mrs. North looked at him and asked as suddenly as it was possible for her to do anything,

"Colburn, do you know where she is?"

"No, I don't—that is, they may have gone somewhere else," he answered, and shut his mouth closely.

Every time the doctor came Mrs. North inquired, "How is my son-in-law to-day?"

She had taken up the phrase "my son-in-law" since she became ill. Her husband thought it was one of her ways of protesting against all thought of a divorce.

The doctor said the deacon was getting along just as well as a man could who was struggling against rheumatic fever with complications. The doctor now thought his pa-

tient would get up in time, but whether he would ever be able to walk straight was another matter.

Miss Riddle had been invaluable. She hadn't slept a wink for no one knew how long. He didn't mind saying that 'Gusty shared with him, the doctor, the glory of having pulled Marcellus Grove through. This glory the speaker seemed to consider to be of larger proportions than did Mr. North, who heard the remark, and who grunted in response to it. He could not resist saying that he guessed Grove had a good constitution, and he guessed nature helped pull him through.

"And do you really think he will be a cripple?" he asked with some anxiety.

But the doctor couldn't say positively. It was extremely probable, however.

Mr. North still kept from his wife the knowledge that he had made any attempt about the divorce. His wife did not know that he had now been to see Grove several times, and had as yet got no decided answer.

But since 'Gusty Riddle was always present, and always tried not to listen, it naturally followed that a great many people did know of these interviews. And the nearly unanimous opinion was that Deacon Grove ought to see about getting that bill the minute he was able. Public opinion also veered now strongly in favor of 'Gusty. Public opinion said that it was time "'Gusty had a chance."

XXI.

"BUT—"

When Katharine returned from that long walk on the beach the sun did not shine. It had gone down into a bank of blue cloud which lay with the solidity of a wall along the western horizon. But the whole dome of the heavens was still blue with that clear, washed color which comes after a rain in the summer.

Katharine paused on the steps to look at the sky. Mrs. Llandaff was no longer there, but she was watching for her niece, and she came out and joined her.

The two women stood quietly for a long time. It became evident that the younger of the two had no intention of speaking. Mrs. Llandaff looked curiously at her, but she was unable to decide what the sorrowful, firm face meant.

"Are you tired of this?" at last asked Mrs. Llandaff.

The girl turned.

"Tired? Oh, no! I should never be tired of this. Is it time for us to leave here? Of course I'm ready to go."

The other shrugged her shoulders. For some reason she felt more incompetent than she had ever felt in her life.

"As for me," she remarked in a superficial tone, "I am almost ready to say that I wish to leave my room of a morning without seeing Cap'n Marble. And I'm weary of answering Mrs. Marble's questions. There are the mountains. Shall we go?"

"If you like, of course. I know I shall love the mountains."

The girl gazed towards the far line of the offing, where a three-master was moving with all sails set.

"Katharine," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Llandaff, "won't you say something to me?"

Again the girl turned towards her companion.

"Is there anything for me to say, Aunt Kate? Didn't Mr. Llandaff—have you seen Mr. Llandaff?"

"Yes."

"He told you that—"

Here Katharine paused, and though her aunt waited she made no attempt towards finishing her sentence.

"Yes, he told me. Now you tell me, Kate, is it true?"

"True that I love him?"—with an increasing pallor. "Yes, that is true." Then she added, "Don't you think I seem to be an unfortunate girl, Aunt Kate?"

Mrs. Llandaff tried to rally from the depression which was fast gaining ground upon her mind.

"Unfortunate?" she repeated. "Well, yes; just for the present. But we will overcome all that."

The woman could not quite meet the girl's eyes, with the solemn earnestness of their questioning. She hesitated. The comfortable assurance of being able to do what she pleased, which had been hers now for so many years, was not quite so strong at just this moment.

"How?" Katharine said, and Mrs. Llandaff knew that her assumption was penetrated by her niece, who continued looking at her.

"Why, that man out there in Feeding Hills will be so tired of this state of affairs that you will be freed. See what your father telegraphed. It's all a mere matter of form. And then—" Mrs. Llandaff paused and smiled warmly at the girl. She continued, "Then you can be happy ever after—and Owen. Have you, perhaps, an idea how happy Owen would be? And he is so dear to me that I would do much to insure him such happiness as he can know. And that is a great deal."

Katharine did not remove her eyes from Mrs. Llandaff's

face as she listened to these words. She became even more pale. She said slowly,

"I think I shall never be happy ever after, Aunt Kate. I have been so happy with you. That is my taste of happiness. Don't you think so?"

"Nonsense!"

Mrs. Llandaff's depression became still greater. She had a dim fear that she was about to "run up against a stone wall," metaphorically speaking; and she did not enjoy doing that. Besides, here was her niece's welfare at stake.

"Nonsense!" she said, louder than before. And then she did not know how to go on. But presently she did go on, adopting a calm, matter-of-fact manner,

"I suppose, Kate, that there is really no doubt but that the divorce will be granted before many months if Mr. Grove lives—a full divorce, freeing both. If he doesn't live, it's the same thing so far as you are concerned. So I think we are justified in— Kate, you really irritate me by keeping that look in your eyes."

"What look do you mean?"

"Why, that look as if—why, as if, after all my efforts, you were still going to be an idiot."

Katharine lowered her eyes. She stood silent. When her aunt spoke again she again fixed her gaze on the face opposite her. She seemed to be trying to find more in the words to which she listened than there was in them; as if she were hoping for something which she yet knew could not come.

"Tell me, Kate—tell me in so many words—if you object to a divorce."

"No! Oh, no! Father knows I want him to do all he can that I may be free from any tie to that man."

"Now you are reasonable. And then you would let yourself be happy, Katharine?"

"Let myself? Oh, Aunt Kate!" trembling somewhat as she spoke.

"Really, I begin to feel that you are not only Roxy's daughter, but my niece."

Another silence now fell upon the two. During this silence Mrs. Llandaff took the girl's hand and began to walk with her along the beach.

A group of sand-pipers ran on ahead of them, seeming to slide over the wet sand.

"Katharine," said the woman in a low voice, "I'm afraid I don't understand you, and yet I thought at first I could know you well. Are you going to fight against good fortune? Are you going to stand and bar the way when happiness comes to you? I told you never to do that. Take whatever bliss is offered you. Heaven knows there will be little enough of it!"

Katharine stopped in her walk. She seized Mrs. Llandaff's other hand, and thus holding her she gazed with grave intentness at her aunt's face.

"I know you told me that," she said. "And, oh, Aunt Kate, I long to be happy! But there are some things so strong in me. I try to conquer them, but I can't yet. And it seems to me that, since I feel so, it must be right for me. I wish I hadn't been brought up just as I was. Or else I wish I'd been different, somehow, so that my bringing up and my real self would be more in accord. I don't know that you understand me, do you, Aunt Kate?"

"Yes, yes, dear child," was the fervent response.

Katharine seemed to find a sort of relief in talking, now she had begun.

"There was a woman in Feeding Hills," she continued, "who had been divorced. She wasn't a good woman"—here the girl trembled. "My mother often talked about that woman. A great many people who came to our house talked about her. I heard them, though they thought I wasn't listening. And I got the idea that she was bad because she was divorced. Don't interrupt me, Aunt Kate. I know now, well enough, that she wasn't bad for that reason. But I was taught what a disgrace it was for a woman to be di-

vorced or not to live with her husband. I can't get over the conviction that it is a disgrace. Oh, don't blame me! I know it is a disgrace in people's eyes. But I can bear that for myself. I can bear anything rather than to go back to that man. But it hurts all the same. Oh, it hurts dreadfully! It wears upon me. But you have made me forget it a great deal. I have really forgotten it at times with you. I feel so old. But I know I'm not really old. And I can't help hoping that in time I shall outgrow this dreadful horror about the disgrace and—oh, Aunt Kate, don't you think I shall, by the time I'm thirty, or forty perhaps, get so I don't have this horrible, horrible feeling about my life?"

There were no tears in Katharine's eyes, but Mrs. Llandaff could not speak for a moment. That young voice, with its searching pathos, had filled her eyes and half choked her, and she was conscious of a strong fear that she was about to come upon something in the girl's character which would not yield to her influence, easily as she had been able to influence her in many ways.

"Of course," said Katharine, "I sha'n't be happy, but I long to get so I shall be hardened." She smiled as she continued, "I think it is hardened that I need to be. I don't want to feel life so intensely. Since I can't be happy, I should like not to feel things much."

"But you shall be happy." Mrs. Llandaff had found her voice, and now spoke with confidence. "And have you no mercy upon Owen? Do you forget him?"

"I remember him," answered the girl.

"What do you mean, then? What are you intending? You will soon be free. Are you going to act upon a senseless whim? Kate, you frighten me."

"I hope I shall be free. But I don't think divorced women ought to marry again. It is revolting, somehow."

Mrs. Llandaff actually stamped her foot on the sand.

"Divorced women!" she cried in a fury. "Katharine, I have no patience with you. You need to be whipped."

Then she stopped and tried to think what was the most

forcible thing she could say, and the more she tried to think the more helpless she felt. She could find no words that were strong enough, and yet she was a woman who ordinarily had plenty of words at her command. But she must speak in some way.

There was that girl, not twenty years old, standing there.

Surely something must be done with her—something that would let some light in upon her mind and make her see things as they were.

But what should be done? Katharine, from what Mrs. Llandaff called a very absurdity of sensitiveness and refinement, had come to this—this "atrocious conclusion" was what the elder woman called it—and here was the poison of her upbringing working, and here was a strain from her mother. Of course, the girl seemed not much more than a child, she was in effect scarcely more than one, but before years and experience should bring wisdom to her she might work irreparable harm; she might destroy her best hope of happiness.

Mrs. Llandaff inwardly raged as these thoughts came hurriedly to her, and at the same time she knew herself powerless.

Making a great struggle against her emotion, she calmly began to remark that her niece could hardly be classed with the ordinary divorced woman; that the circumstances of the case made the whole affair very different; that—

"Aunt Kate," interrupted the girl, "do you think I haven't been all over everything in my mind hundreds of times? I try not to feel so. I try not to care as I do. But it's all of no use. I shall be that thing they call a divorced woman, and you know, under the circumstances, I want to be that, since it is the best thing there is left for me to be. I tell you, Aunt Kate," with a swift access of fury in her face and voice, "it's a terrible thing to think of one's mother as I think of mine!"

Mrs. Llandaff waited before she spoke. Finally she asked,

"Are you resolved, really resolved to—to be so silly as to refuse to be happy because of what has happened?"

"Why, Aunt Kate, I couldn't be happy."

"I deny that."

Katharine's eyes were full of a passionate longing, but she repeated,

"I tell you I couldn't be happy."

This repetition brought her sister so plainly before Mrs. Llandaff that she so far forgot herself as to raise her voice as she answered,

"And I tell you that you know nothing about it! Can't you take the word of a woman so much older than you and who knows what she is talking about?"

For answer Katharine made a quick movement and put her arms round her aunt's neck and her head on her shoulder. She pressed closely against Mrs. Llandaff, who held her while the girl sobbed heavily, as those sob whose agony takes hold of the roots of life. But they were dry sobs—tears did not relieve them.

At last she whispered, "I love him so, Aunt Kate, and I shall love him more and more. It does seem as if I could not bear it."

The arms tightened about her.

Mrs. Llandaff said with a kind of hard recklessness,

"Perhaps Mr. Grove will die. As a widow, I suppose you would not think it necessary to reject consolation. Or do your scruples extend even as far as that?"

The girl's sobs ceased.

"Please don't talk to me in that way," she whispered again.

Then Mrs. Llandaff's conscience smote her.

"Oh, forgive me," she whispered back.

Katharine clung fast about her aunt's neck while she said brokenly,

"If you stop being kind to me, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"I shall never stop being kind to you. But I do wish,

Kate, that you had—well, shall I say I wish you had a little broader mind?"

"But since I haven't, what shall I do?"

Katharine lifted her head and tried to smile. Then she went on in a desperate voice, "You spoke about that man's dying. I can't tell you why, but I have a reason, and it isn't a notion either—but I have a reason that will make me very much troubled if Deacon Grove dies. That is, if he dies now, of this illness."

Mrs. Llandaff almost gasped as she heard this.

"Katharine," she said, "are you in your right mind?"

"I don't know."

"I know, then. If you go on like this I shall suspect you of incipient insanity."

"I can't explain about this," continued Katharine, not replying to her companion's last remark. "It isn't pleasant to want any one to die."

"Perhaps you will tell me that you will grieve for Mr. Grove if he should die?"

"No."

Katharine was thinking about her father. She was thinking that if Deacon Grove should die now her father would always have his death on his conscience. She shrank from that thought. She could not speak of this matter even to her aunt. This was her father's secret.

She withdrew a few steps. She picked up her hat, which had fallen upon the sand. She smoothed her hair back with one hand. But it kept flying about her face and eyes. She held her hat while she gazed still at Mrs. Llandaff, whose own eyes were directed towards the ocean.

"Are you discouraged with me?" asked Kate.

"Yes, I am."

"But you see I can't help being just what I am, can I, Aunt Kate?"

"Perhaps not. But listen to me, my child, when I tell you this: that when you are older you will see clearly how crude and ignorant you are now. You will see that we

can't have things exactly right in this world, so we are glad to take them partly right. You will know it all. That is, you will know it if you have more mind than your mother has. And I think you have."

"You don't think I'm at all like my mother, do you?" with startled indignation.

"A little."

"Oh, I hope not!"

Katharine put on her hat. Then she took it off immediately, as if it oppressed her.

"I want to say something more," she said. "And then I don't wish to talk with you on the subject again."

"Well?"

The girl hesitated.

"It's about Mr. Llandaff," she said.

Mrs. Llandaff waited.

"I don't expect to see him again," continued Katharine.

"Never see him again?" asked the other.

"I don't dare to expect to see him. Yes, I mean I never shall see him."

Mrs. Llandaff smiled.

"How easily youth uses the word never," she exclaimed. "Perhaps you will meet Owen a few years hence, and be amazed that you ever thought you loved him."

Katharine's eyes were fixed on her aunt in dilated wonder.

"I don't think I love him. I know," she said simply. "I want you to tell him that I love him with all my heart. Will you tell him that?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Llandaff.

And again she found her eyes filling and her throat closing.

She thought that Katharine had more to say, but as she did not speak the elder woman at last asked,

"Is there anything else?"

"Oh, no. What else should there be? Only that I love him with all my heart, and I shall always love him. I wish

him to know that. I told him, but I should like to have you say it to him some time when you are with him and I am away."

Mrs. Llandaff could not even smile, though these words sounded so piteously young in her ears. She looked at the face before her and said to herself,

"Possibly she will always love him. Such things have happened."

Instead of replying, she said abruptly,

"Let us start for the mountains this very day. That is, we will start if we can get that man who owns a horse to harness the animal and take us."

It turned out that the man who owned a horse was induced to harness him, and the two women left the little hamlet on the bluff by the ocean.

Since Owen was gone, or going, Katharine would have preferred to stay there. But then she argued with herself that it would be better for her to leave any place which had such associations for her.

The girl was trying to fill her mind with resolutions of the most practical kind. It must be confessed, however, that she did not succeed very well. But she believed that in the course of years she should succeed. She looked forward eagerly to that time. She imagined that she could make herself over into a person like some she had seen whose nerves, if they had ever had any, were so well sheathed that nothing reached them; whose slow, phlegmatic hearts were safely intrenched from any onslaughts of emotion.

So she found herself at the end of three days in a house perched on a plateau in the Catskills. There were a good many people in the house.

Mrs. Llandaff said they had tried nature adulterated only by the Marbles, now they would try nature adulterated with fashion.

On their way through Boston they had stopped at the dressmaker's, and Katharine had been measured for clothes "suitable for a young person."

After a few days these clothes arrived, and the girl was requested to put them on and disport herself in them.

Mrs. Llandaff looked at her niece delightedly, and Katharine looked in the glass with wonder mingled with her satisfaction.

"Gowns have a great consolatory power," said Mrs. Llandaff.

She took the girl's arm, and the two went down to dinner, Katharine being for the first time in her life dressed, as her aunt said, appropriately.

In Feeding Hills there was no dressing for dinner in Roxy's house.

Whatever the disease was which afflicted Mrs. North, it had not yielded to the potions concocted for it by the doctor. When questioned by the neighbors as to "what was the matter of North's wife," the physician wisely replied that it was "an obscure complication; that she might recover, and she might not." So that, whatever happened, the doctor was right.

The woman who had been engaged to come in and do up the work came earlier and did up more and more work, as more and more Mrs. North found herself unable to do it.

She used to sit in her chair and watch her husband when he was in the house. She hadn't forgotten her fear of the concealed razor, and she thought a great deal, in a stultified kind of way, of the fact that Colburn had pushed Deacon Grove into the water.

She wondered what the Congregational church, called in Feeding Hills "the orthodox church," would say if it were known that its most prominent deacon had been well-nigh murdered by another church-member. Though Deacon Grove had strayed often into Methodist meetings in pursuit of pretty girls, he was faithful to his own church and stood high within it. He had been prayed for in the pulpit every Sunday since his illness.

Perhaps these prayers were being answered, for certain it was that Marcellus Grove was recovering.

As the days and weeks now went by, and the time had come for September's melancholy heats, it became known that Mr. Grove had been able to hobble out into the yard and sit there for a while.

It was upon 'Gusty Riddle's arm upon one side and a crutch on the other that he had hobbled; and it was 'Gusty Riddle who had prepared his chair with pillows, and she who watched beside him to see that no want should be unsupplied.

In these propitious days Miss Riddle laughed more than ever. The deacon did not laugh, but it could not be denied that he was very dependent upon his nurse. And she was so attentive that it became a universal belief that 'Gusty would now "finally have her chance." Just what her chance was was never mentioned, but every one appeared to understand what it was.

Illness is a great power, and Mr. Grove, after many vacillations, saw the matter of the divorce in what Colburn North called "the right light." Mr. North had been persistent, in season and out of season, and the man had succumbed. He had begun proceedings for a divorce, and the proceedings went on as rapidly as was consistent with the august majesty of the law. Under the circumstances this was all that could be expected.

Mr. North took occasion to say to Miss Riddle that "the divorce was all owing to her."

She laughed, and blushed, and bridled, and assured Mr. North that she had never passed one word with the deacon on the subject.

"Oh, I believe that," he answered. "It wasn't necessary. Anybody with half an eye can see how things are going."

And 'Gusty laughed again. It was on his return from this interview that Mrs. North stopped her rocking to say,

"Colburn, Mrs. Budd told me something to-day 't I can't hardly believe.

"Did she?"

"Yes. She said that Deacon Grove was goin' to git a bill. Did you know it?"

"Yes."

"How long have you known?"

"I've known for some time that he talked of it."

Roxy rocked in silence. After a while she said that she had always hoped their family never 'd be disgraced.

"Disgraced!" said her husband in but partially subdued fury.

He was washing his hands at the sink, and he turned as he spoke.

"Don't drip the water on the floor, Colburn," she said. "The floor's all been mopped up this afternoon."

He wheeled back to the sink again, and splashed the water over his face.

"Yes," said Roxy. "I did hope our family never 'd be disgraced."

Mr. North splashed again, more copiously than before.

"You remember the Dawes woman, don't you, Colburn?"

"Yes," with the towel muffling his voice.

"Her husband got a bill from her, you know," in a whining monotone.

"I know he did. But I hope you don't mention our Kitty and that Dawes woman in the same day, do you?"

Mr. North tried to speak calmly. He scrubbed his face until it seemed as if he would take the skin from it.

"Her husband got a bill," said Roxy. "When a man gits a bill everybody thinks there's something the trouble about the woman."

Here Mr. North removed the towel from his face and fixed his eyes on his wife. As she met his glance she shrank visibly. He could not know that she was thinking of that hitherto unseen razor.

"I guess we won't talk any more," said the man, after making an attempt to speak to which his voice did not respond.

Mrs. North sat silent until her husband had taken his hat

from the nail and was going out. Then she asked, as she had asked once before,

"Colburn, do you know where she is?"

"Not precisely."

"I s'pose she's with my sister?"

"Yes, I s'pose she is."

Mr. North was moving towards the door.

"Colburn," said his wife again. He paused.

"If anything should happen to me," said Mrs. North, "you needn't send for her. She's ben a disobedient child. You needn't send for her."

"All right. But I guess there won't anything happen to you. You're getting along first rate," in that optimistic way which people use towards invalids.

Then Mr. North left the house. Roxy sat on there, rocking sometimes, sometimes sitting motionless, with her hands in her lap.

As the weeks went on nothing new happened to her. Her disease did not seem to progress. Mr. North hired a woman to live there and work.

If any one ever suggested his sending for his daughter, he said he should do no such thing. His wife didn't want her sent for, and he was able to hire somebody. He took care to state that Katharine did not know her mother was not well, and he also took care that she should not know it.

The papers in October contained paragraphs to the effect that the well-known public speaker, Mrs. Owen Llandaff, had gone to Europe for a much-needed rest. Some of these paragraphs also informed the world that the great public speaker was accompanied by her niece, Miss Katharine North.

Colburn North never knew precisely how he passed that following winter. He only knew that he kept at work even more strenuously than usual.

His daughter wrote to him from different places in Europe, and he wrote to her.

His face aged greatly. He was glad there was a third person in his home. He could sit there evenings, looking over town accounts, with much more ease, knowing that he and his wife were not the only human beings in the room.

Before spring Deacon Grove had "got his bill."

Mr. North sent the local paper with the announcement to Mrs. Llandaff, and Mrs. Llandaff, having read it, silently handed it to her niece, who grew red and then pale, but who did not speak.

"Do you still have those ridiculous notions about a divorced woman?" finally asked Mrs. Llandaff.

"Still have them? Yes; why should I change?" was the response.

"Why should you not change?" retorted the other. "It is only fools who never change."

Lest she should lose her temper entirely, Mrs. Llandaff closed her lips and refrained from making some other remarks which demanded to be spoken. She scrutinized her niece still more closely than she had ever done.

The girl had really changed very little in her months of travel. She had acquired the habit of wearing well-fitting and appropriate clothes with entire unconsciousness. And this is a habit which some women never acquire. She had a certain ease which she used not to have; still she was not much changed. She did not know that she was any different at all outwardly. But inwardly she felt an indefinable difference which seemed to her to make her another woman.

Owen Llandaff was travelling, she hardly knew where. She never asked any questions or seemed to listen when her aunt would sometimes read scraps of his letters. She thought that her face remained the same. She had a dim idea that Mrs. Llandaff watched her. She did not resent this watchfulness. Life was not, somehow, nearly as interesting as she had expected to find it. She was looking for some emotion which did not come.

She believed she had now fully arrived at the conclusion

that she had nothing in the future. This conclusion was stronger upon her than ever before, she thought.

She still loved Mrs. Llandaff, but she did not always agree with her; and when she was obliged to disagree she was so grieved as to be made almost ill. But Katharine never yielded on any of these occasions. Mrs. Llandaff used to close such conversations with the remark,

"Well, when you grow older you will change your mind; that is, if you have any mind worth changing."

To her own utmost astonishment Mrs. Llandaff one day, when alone, came to this conclusion: "Why, the child influences me now fully as much as I influence her."

The two were established in London for the spring, when Mrs. Llandaff received the second paper from Mr. North. This contained the announcement of the marriage of Marcellus Grove and Miss Augusta Riddle, both of Feeding Hills. And a paragraph among the "locals" congratulated Deacon Grove upon being able now to throw aside his crutches.

Mrs. Llandaff did not give this paper to Katharine. She laid it on the table and walked away.

She sent a note to her step-son, who was visiting his father in Wales. And in due time—that is, in the quickest possible time in which the journey could be made—young Llandaff arrived in London.

He had had opportunity to modify that involuntary conclusion which he had reached in regard to Katharine's attitude, as a divorced woman, towards her future life. Of course it was a horrible phrase. He could not wonder that she shuddered at it and shrank from it. But since it was only a phrase he mocked at himself that he had ever imagined she could be vitally affected by it.

Nothing on this earth that could keep her from him should be allowed vitally to affect her.

This was what was dominantly in his mind, and in his blood as well, as he stood waiting in his step-mother's lodging.

Mrs. Llandaff knocked at Katharine's door, and then opened it to make the following announcement,

"Owen wants to see you."

The girl started to her feet.

"Owen!" she said.

"Yes. He is waiting in the drawing-room. He has only a moment to stay—he says. Don't be unkind to a poor creature who was so unfortunate as to fancy he loved you. He has probably forgotten all about that experience by this time. Men are curious animals."

At this Katharine, who had stood hesitatingly, came forward.

"I will go down with you," she said.

"But I'm not going down. I've seen him."

Katharine looked straight into her aunt's eyes.

"Then I will go alone," she responded.

Llandaff rose to meet the girl. She stopped just within the door.

He went quickly to her and took both her hands.

"I have come to ask if you have forgotten that you told me you loved me," he said with tolerable composure.

He thought he spoke with remarkable calmness, considering that his heart was beating in his throat, and in his ears, and in his eyes also, so that there was a blur over his vision.

"As for me," he went on hurriedly, one word fiercely pushing the other from his unsteady lips—"as for me, I love you more and more every hour I live. There is nothing in this world to prevent us from being happy. And I mean to be happy."

Here he flung up his head in a way Mrs. Llandaff could have interpreted; in a way that made Katharine tremble and try to shrink away from him.

"Katharine," he cried with some savageness, "have you a mania for renunciation?"

Her eyes were on his face.

"Because if you have, I tell you now I will not be sacri-

ficed. No, I will not. We are going to be happy together. Do you hear me?"

"But—" she began, her eyes dropping. "I can't make it seem right. I—"

Her voice stopped utterly. She stood there with her lips parted as they had parted to speak.

It was not certain whether Owen knew how much obstinacy there was in that little figure. He felt able to conquer anything.

"Dearest," he said, now with nothing but tenderness in his voice, "surely this is permitted love."

Those two last words seemed to touch her as nothing else had done.

She leaned imperceptibly towards him.

"Do you believe so? Do you really believe so?" she asked with pathetic eagerness.

"I know it," vehemently. "Oh, Katharine, you are absurd, you are ridiculous. Child, do you stand there and think you can fight against love and happiness? Do you think you can do that?"

He pressed still nearer.

"Aunt Kate says I'm narrow-minded," she whispered.

"You are, you are!"

"And she said once she was afraid I am a little like my mother. Are you sure I'm narrow-minded, Mr. Llandaff?" earnestly.

"Oh, I know it! I'm convinced of it."

The young man breathed more quickly still, though he could not help smiling even in his agitation.

"Don't torture me like this!" he cried suddenly. "It is not worth while. Katharine, listen to me! Don't you know that, whatever we do, everything escheats to the king at last?"

"And you are the king?"

"Yes, yes! Since you love me."

Her eyes filled, and her eyelashes fell. A quiver passed over her face.

"I do love you. Oh, that is true," she said. "But—"

Llandaff felt justified in saying in the most arbitrary manner,

"Katharine, I will have no 'but' in this matter."

THE END

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